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#8



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DREADITORIAL

Sinister salutations, Shadowfans! What have we wrought for you this time around, you ask? Well, it just so happens that issue #8 marks *Shadowland's* second year anniversary and we've spared no effort in crafting an edition worthy of that honor. We're reaching for the stars, literally, as we revisit the *Alien* franchise – so get your pulse rifles and motion trackers ready – the Xenomorphs are on the hunt! Uncharacteristic for a horror film of the late 1970s, *Alien* gave birth to a marketing frenzy and we take a look at some of the many movie-related products that continue to entice collectors.

Also on hand, Brett Taylor offers his view on the films featuring the great master of macabre, Edgar Allan Poe. Vincent S. Tobia reminds us why we 'fear the sphere' in his retrospective on the *Phantasm* franchise. And DC Comics' The Flash gets his due with a riveting read about his early '90s live-action television show. We haven't even made mention yet of Gerardo de Leon's vampire films, or our look at the savage mutant himself – Wolverine!

All these goodies should make for an interesting summer issue, fitting for what will be an exciting summer. The last few months have already given us the theatrical releases of *G.I. Joe Retaliation*, *Iron Man 3* and *Star Trek Into Darkness*, and with many more potential blockbusters on the way including *World War Z*, *Lone Ranger*, *Pacific Rim*, *R.I.P.D.*, *The Conjuring*, *The Wolverine*, *300: Rise of an Empire*, *Elysium*, and *Kick Ass 2*.

Of course, we can't forget the imminent theatrical release *Man of Steel*, which may be the film Warner Brothers needs to springboard their *Justice League* movie onto the fast track. And Superman won't be the only caped hero to have a profitable summer; the Adam West Batman television show has *finally* received product licensing (read more about it in our *News Bites* section!) which means an influx of Batman '66 merchandise will be heading our way!

Now, without further delay, let's step out of the blinding summer sun and venture deep into the shadows once more...

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Front Cover/Back Cover: A stunning spectacle at each side, both from the extraordinary Dwayne Pinkney! The drooling beast from 1979's *Alien* honors our front cover, while the scarlet speedster himself, the Flash, handles the action at the back! Dwayne Pinkney is available for commissions at DPinkneyArt@hotmail.com – more of his phenomenal artwork can also be seen at www.ShadowlandMagazine.com.

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NEWS BITES

BATMAN '66 RETURNS

For years the licensing rights to the 1966 live-action *Batman* TV show, starring Adam West and Burt Ward, has languished in a state of legal turmoil. With matters finally resolved, 2013 will see an explosion of *Batman* related merchandise from the '66 program. Products are set to include

a line of 6" action figures from Mattel (an 18" Batman will also be available, released through NECA), Batman and Catwoman Barbie dolls, Rubies Halloween costumes, a series of model kits distributed by Moebius, and a Hallmark Christmas ornament. An official release date for the show on DVD still has yet to be announced.

MONSTER MASH-UP

A remake of the 1987 cult film, *The Monster Squad* is currently in development. Rob Cohen (*The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*) is onboard to direct. No release date is yet known.

SOMETIMES DEAD IS BETTER

A documentary is in the works about the making of the 1989 film, *Pet Sematary*, based on the novel by Stephen King. *Unearthed & Untold: The Path to Pet Sematary* will feature interviews with the cast, crew, and Maine locals who helped make the film, along with never-before-seen behind-the-scenes footage. The documentary will also explore the legacy the film has had in horror cinema and with fans. A release date has yet to be announced.

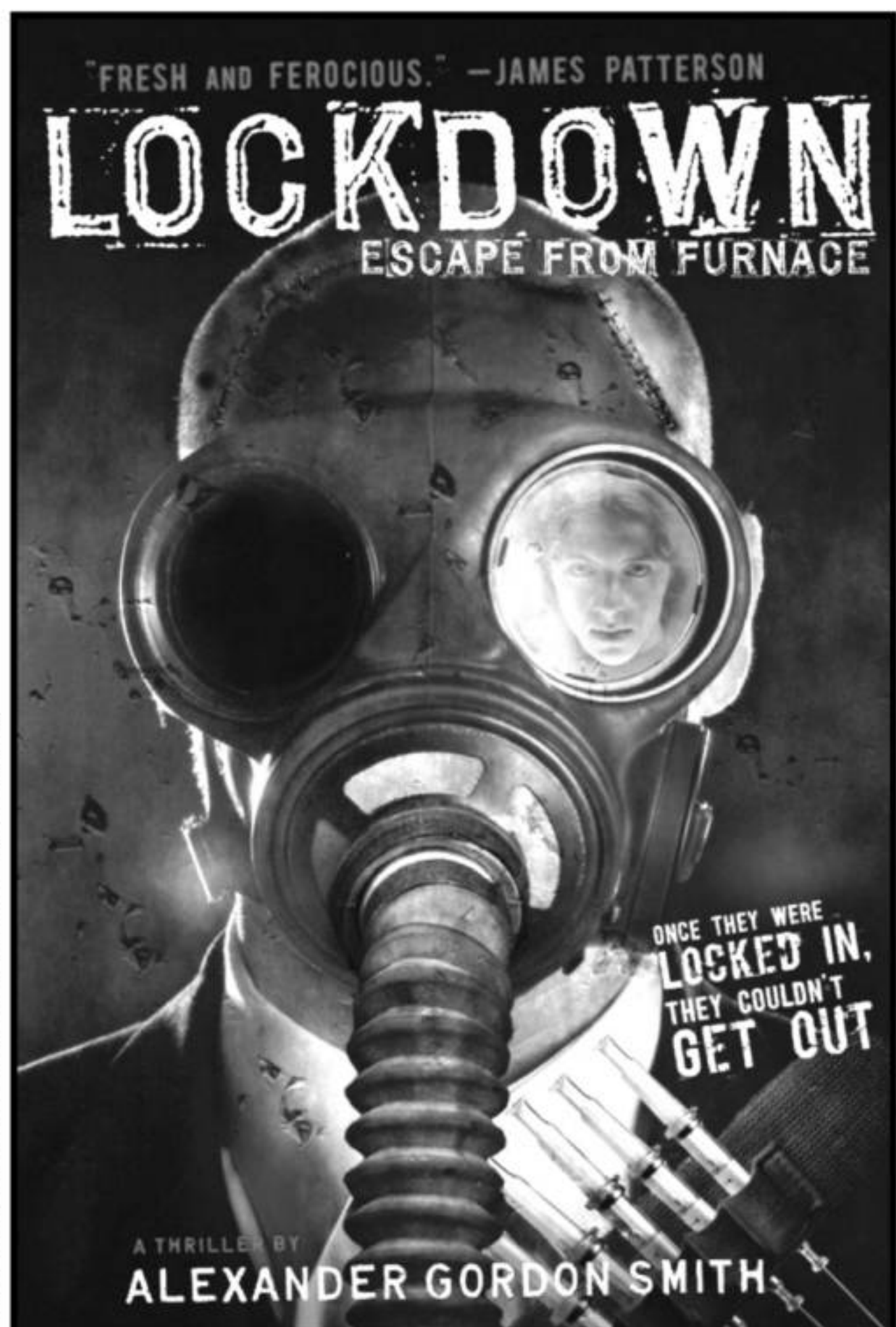
GATCHAMAN GOES LIVE-ACTION

First airing in Japan as an anime in 1972, *Gatchaman* is receiving a live-action makeover this summer. The original series, released in North America as *Battle of the Planets* (1978) and *G-Force: Guardians*

of Space (1986), follows the adventures of five teenagers – the Science Ninja Team Gatchaman – who dress in bird-themed costumes and combat an evil organization bent on world domination. The live-action update will hit Japanese theaters on August 24th, 2013.

UPCOMING ADVENTURES

The Goddard Film Group has recently acquired several sci-fi/adventure literary properties for development as feature films. Novels include Alex Gordon Smith's *Escape from Furnace*, Jerry Pournelle's *Janissaries*, and Madeleine Grattan's *Jexium Island*. The Goddard Film Group was founded by Gary Goddard, whose credits include directing the 1987 live-action *Masters of the Universe* film, creating the highly praised *Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future* television series and the *Skeleton Warriors* cartoon. Goddard has also worked on and designed some of the most acclaimed theme park attractions in history, including *Star Trek: The Experience*, *Terminator 2: 3D*, and *Jurassic Park: The Ride*.

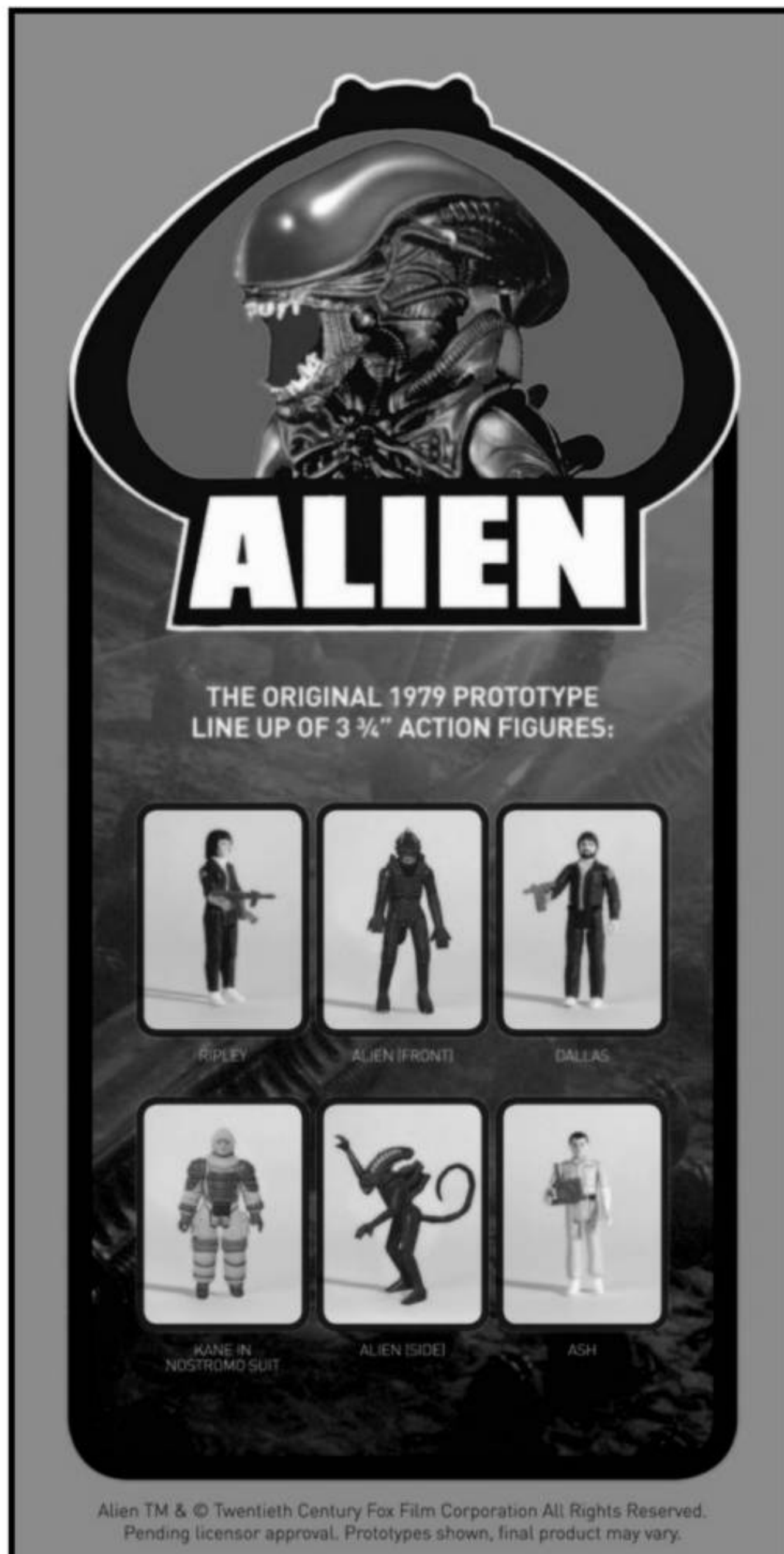


MARVEL DOWNSIZES

Marvel's smallest hero, Ant-Man, will be making his way to the big screen in 2015. The film is set to be directed by Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Scott Pilgrim*), who has been involved with the project for nearly a decade. A potential *Ant-Man* film had first been announced in the early 1990s and has lingered in 'development hell' for years.

CLASSIC PLASTIC

After more than 30 years the scrapped toy line for *Alien* will finally arrive on shelves. Super7 has acquired the original prototypes for the unreleased run of 3 3/4" action figures (they were intended to be released in 1979, but were cancelled by toy company, Kenner). These figures will each feature the original sculpting, T-shaped waists, and five points of articulation. Included



in the line are: Ripley, Dallas, Ash, Kane in Nostromo suit, and, of course, the title alien. A 2013 release is expected.

MONKEY TROUBLE

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes has been slated for a May 23rd, 2014 release. The sequel will continue where 2011's *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* left off, with Caesar and his simian army overtaking humanity.

ROAD TO RUIN

Mad Max: Fury Road is scheduled for a 2014 release. Directed by George Miller, this outing marks the fourth film in the Mad Max series. Tom Hardy (*The Dark Knight Rises*) will be filling in as the title character, a role played by Mel Gibson in the previous installments.



NEW NIGHTMARES

Horror shock rocker Alice Cooper is rumored to be working on a new album of cover songs due out sometime late 2013/early 2014. His last studio album, *Welcome 2 My Nightmare*, was released in 2010. Most recently, a two-disc live album, *No More Mr. Nice Guy: Live*, hit stores in 2012.

NEW BLOOD

A sequel to Konami's 2010 video game, *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* will be released on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 by late 2013. The game will follow Gabriel Belmont as he once again battles against the forces of darkness.

MORE MUNSTERS?

September 2013 will see the release of a new batch of *Munsters* action figures, including Herman and Grandpa in their 'Hot Rod' outfits, a new version of Lily (titled 'Raceway' Lily), and Uncle Gilbert.

ALIEN

REVISITING THE TERROR FROM SPACE

**EXPLORING THE LEGACY OF
SCIENCE FICTION'S ICONIC FRANCHISE**



Thinking about the *Alien* franchise, the first thing that really comes to define the decades of bizarre and fascinating havoc that the sinister Xenomorph species have managed to span is something that is often overlooked. Most anyone can tell that *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986), *Alien 3* (1992), and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) are vastly different just from their visuals. *Alien* presents itself as a slow creeping slasher film set in space (the first of its kind really), *Aliens* gives us an action packed vision of grunt combat in the future, *Alien 3* is the series' avant garde climax and *Alien: Resurrection* is ineffably its wacky, after the fact cousin.

Appearances aside, one of the most important and yet overlooked components of this series is its very timeline. The first film in the franchise that I watched was *Aliens*, and being about 6 or 7 at the time, I've had trouble distancing myself from Warrant Officer Ellen Ripley's story ever since. What I present here is my understanding of the *Alien* quadrology in the same order that I first saw each of these incredibly cosmic science fiction films. Looking back, I'm convinced that watching *Aliens* first, then *Alien*, followed by *Alien 3* and *Alien: Resurrection* was what made me fall in love with the series.

Never before had I seen a group of films with stories so closely and cleverly interrelated, somehow operating in the same fictional universe and yet presenting visually unique, jarring and disjunctive qualities which allow each film to become its own adventure and ordeal.

What follows is my in-depth journey through the *Alien* universe, beginning with *Aliens*, then back to *Alien* and rounding off with *Alien 3* and *Alien: Resurrection*. I hope that maybe I can unpack even just a little bit of the mysterious, dark fury that has left me thinking about LV-426 for nearly two decades.

PART 1: *ALIENS*

"It's Game Over, Man!"

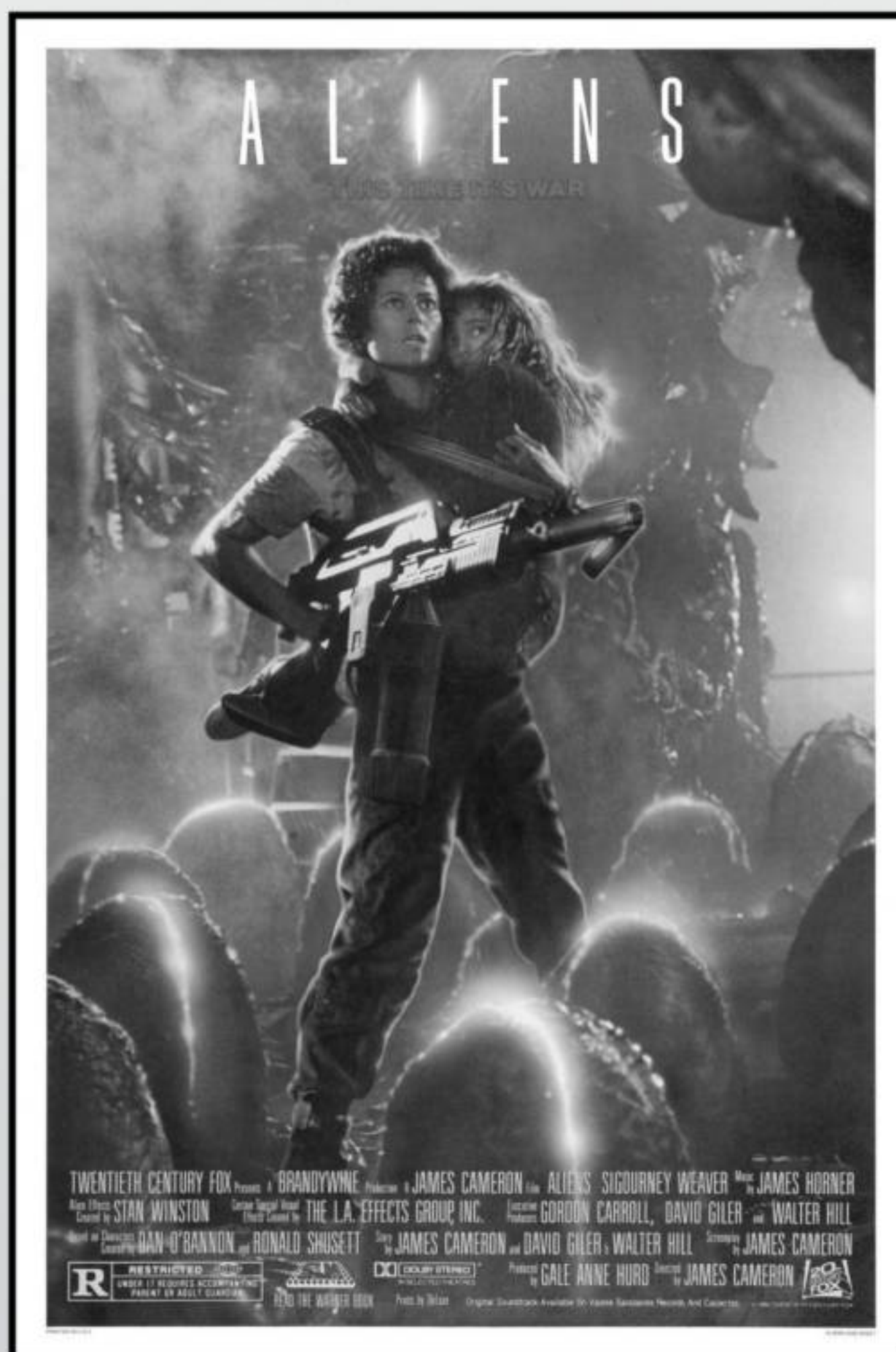
More than twenty years after its release, James Cameron's *Aliens* holds up as an exquisitely designed film, with an excellent use of sets (nearly the whole film takes place on ships and manmade corridors floating through space) as well as key mood lighting. The mise-en-scène that Cameron constructs is absolutely impeccable and before he became an eccentric director turned deep sea explorer (seriously, a tweet of his reads: "Phase One expedition is over after 13 dives...Scientists at work now analyzing the results"), *Aliens* exists as an early testament to when Cameron was, well, the man.

Aliens starts off as a lonely lifeboat floats through space, until it is picked up by a deep space salvage team hoping to make a quick buck on some long forgotten vessel. Inside the lifeboat, the team discovers Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and her cat Jonesy in deep hypersleep and are disappointed by the less than substantial dollar value of their find. But, we come to

see that Ripley, who has been drifting through space for 57 years, is now in a world very different from the one she left behind.

Okay, so this opening seems basic enough, right? But when we take a closer look, it's the point of entry that Cameron places on the viewer that stands as a great example of why I love this series so damn much. Everything here is implied and it's not until you take a step back to examine the scenario that it becomes obvious that *Aliens* wants to speak volumes with this preamble alone. The very fact that there are deep space salvage teams routinely searching for lost or discarded space crafts (cosmic *American Pickers* of the galaxy) says something about how humans occupy space. No longer are we living in a time when space travel is strictly for exploration, but instead, the fact that Ripley's shuttle was found by a salvage team means that as humans, we feel so familiar with space travel that we actually are now scouring galaxies, looking for our own lost or misplaced crafts; as humans, we have established our own presence in the universe.

More telling of our level of comfort in space would be the salvage teams' lack of interest in finding Ripley. If a woman was found in hypersleep, drifting aimlessly through space for who knows how long in





today's day and age, the questions surrounding her would be endless: Who is she? Why is she drifting alone? What was she escaping from?

After a frustrating meeting with the heads of her ex-employer, the menacing Weyland-Yutani Corporation, Ripley is told that the baleful alien creature with acid for blood that killed her crew and forced her to self-destruct her commercial towing vehicle, the Nostromo, has never been recorded in over 300 surveyed worlds. Even more horrifying, Ripley finds out that there has been a colony of "terraformers" (people who operate Weyland-Yutani brand atmosphere processors to make uninhabitable planets 'breatheable') on the bleak LV-426 for nearly 20 years. Days later, sly Weyland-Yutani representative Carter Burke (Paul Reiser) accompanied by Lieutenant Gorman (William Hope), come knocking to ask her to do the unthinkable. After losing contact with the colonists of LV-426, they want Ripley to return to the planetoid that destroyed her life, as an advisor on their rescue mission.

Being promised that her revoked space flight license will be instantly restored, Ripley eventually gives in whilst being assured that she will be protected by marines with state-of-the-art fire power. This is the genius in Cameron's film: from the very onset of the mission, no matter how many promises of safety and protection Ripley is given, we can't help but feel her distrust and absolute dread to return to LV-426. It's with these sharp emotions and Ripley's daring decision to return that *Aliens* embarks upon its ride through Xenomorph hell.

The glimmering blues and dark greys that accent all of Cameron's earliest works like *The*



Terminator (1984) and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1992) are evident in *Aliens* and indeed provide a unique visual aspect to the film. While moving from the corridors of the Colonial Marines' warship, the USS Sulaco, then to the terraformer colony, Cameron uses bright reds and cool blues to emphasize scenes with stark visuals. But still, a great majority of *Aliens'* success is carried on the backs of the rough-and-tumble



marines: badass with a heart Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn), spazzy joker Private Hudson (Bill Paxton), lady-Rambo Private Vasquez (Janette Goldstein) and artificial human Bishop (Lance Henriksen). The grunts chemistry is impeccable because it's so very believable, and this is no doubt a result of Cameron's insistence that the actors spend two weeks together prior to pre-production in order to bond. Seeing as Weaver was away working on another project during this time, the sense of her alienation from this pack is not only interesting, but completely authentic.

Hearing Ripley try to brief the marines on their mission is a frustrating scene, as Vasquez and Hudson laugh off this rescue as just another "bug hunt." In trying to express the severity of the situation, Ripley brings up one of *Aliens'* most attractive and enthralling ideas: if the crew of the Nostromo was obliterated by just *one* alien, we can only imagine what hundreds of these beasts could do. A terrifying thought indeed; when we see the innards of the wrecked, barricaded and desolate colony, the feeling of great discomfort that Cameron edges at when Ripley finds out about LV-426 comes full circle: something very wrong has happened here and at nearly an hour into the film, we still don't know what it is.

Later the marines enter the alien nest, tucked away under the atmosphere processor; the footage we're fed makes you drool with awe and curiosity. We see the lulled colonists cocooned in slime while monstrous alien eggs lay at their feet, waiting for the perfect time to latch onto their faces and plant their demon seeds. It's this discovery sequence that Cameron uses as the fulcrum for a genius method designed to horrify viewers while simultaneously titillate them with the marines' finding of the slimy crumbs in the Xenomorphs' bread trail. It's by using these P.O.V. combat cameras (which, in 1986, were many years ahead of the found footage genre) that *Aliens* not only places us right over the marines shoulders as they uncover the horrors around them, but makes combat scenes that much more eerie and intense.

Over distorted monitors we see nearly all of the marines get wiped out in a matter of minutes, but the sheer action in this sequence of fuzzy screen carnage speaks louder to something else...

Whether it's seeing the aliens "coming out of the f**king walls, man!" or more than one team member die at the creatures' claws and their own combat errors alike (in the mix of chaos a flamethrower accidentally gets turned on a marine, sending him to a fiery death), Ripley's warnings to the over-confident marines echo with an eardrum-splitting resonance. These types of scenes allow *Aliens* to say so much: the dangers and patterns of human arrogance, our bodies' fragility and vulnerability to simple traumas and our utter lack of understanding and reverence for the untold terrors that lay dormant in our universe.

As I said, *Aliens* takes us on a wild ride, but it's mainly because Cameron does a clever job of keeping the excitement going. When Ripley and the sole surviving colonist, Newt (Carrie Henn), get locked in the medical bay with two hostile facehuggers, watching Ripley fight for her life as the slimy tail of the parasitoid comes dangerously close to turning her chest into an Xenomorph's cradle is jaw dropping. When it's revealed that Burke masterminded this in a fiendishly vain effort to sneak Ripley and Newt's alien-impregnated bodies back to Earth, while hoping to sell the alien organism to Weyland-Yutani's bio-weapons division, Cameron again thickens the plot for us. By doing so, we're reminded of the bigger picture which exists outside of this ordeal, and slapped in the face by the incredulity and heinous greed that seems to continually

drive us humans. The alien species is the most dangerous organism in the universe, capable of adapting to any environment, overtaking any species and hell-bent on destroying all. If there was ever any example of evil incarnate in our universe, the universal Black Death so to speak, the alien would be it and to imagine that *anyone* would harbor the idea of trying to tame and sell this weapon of mass destruction is a very diabolical and dangerous one indeed.

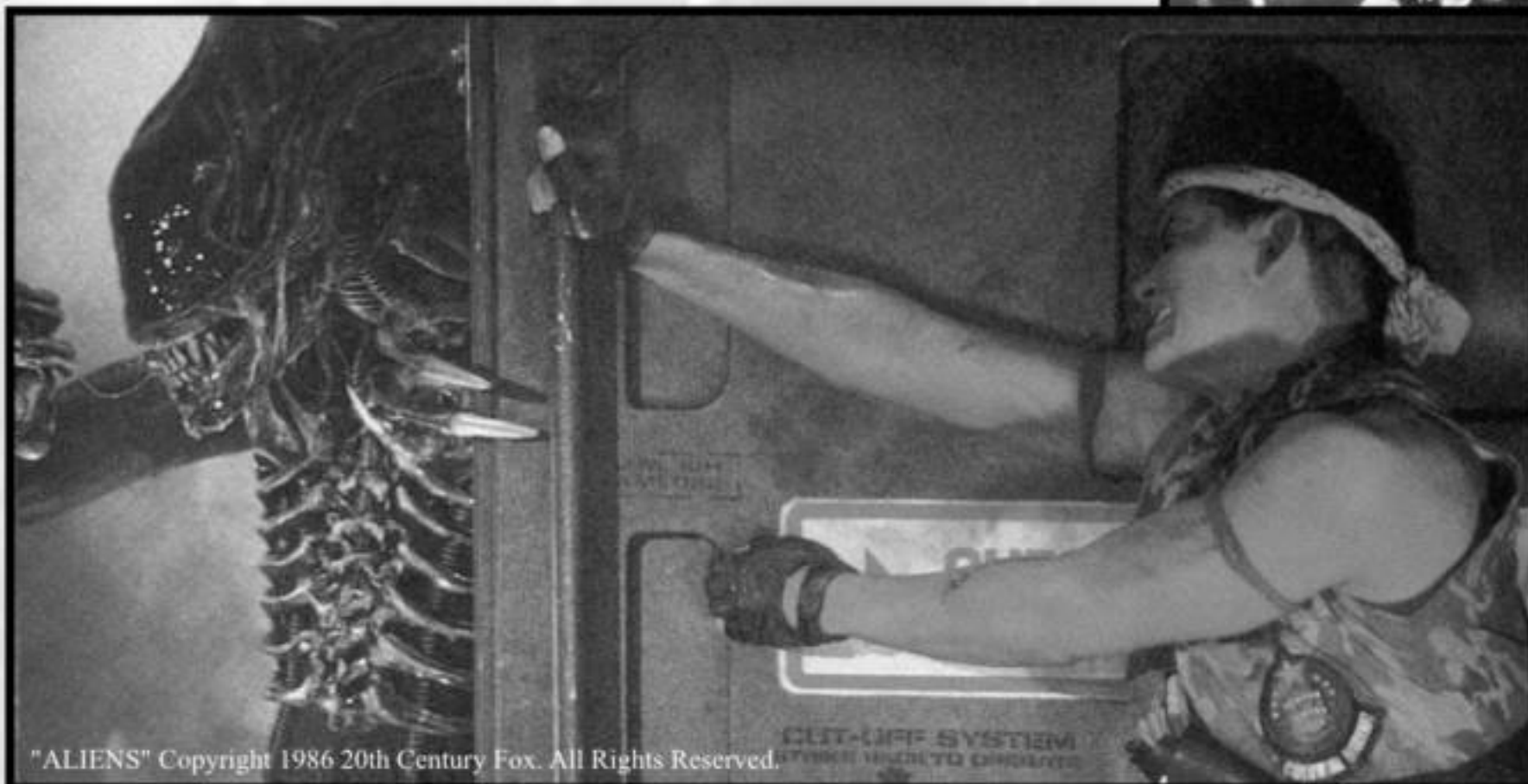
With a double climax and Ripley kicking some serious ass, *Aliens* also maintains excitement because the film continually turns over on itself. Shifting from a bizarre rescue mission to a science fiction survival action epic, we see Ripley take charge of the marines' downward spiralling situation and eventually going head to head with the Queen Alien in an exhausting, final blowout. One also can't forget the sardonic and laugh-out-loud funny moments provided by Hudson's loud mouth and always flapping lips – and to consider yourself well acquainted with contemporary sci-fi, having heard Hudson's infamous, "its game over, man" line is an absolute must.



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In what many like to dismiss as Cameron styled 'gun porn' (another prominent component of the director's earlier works), it's impossible to deny *Aliens*' uncanny



ability to make you drool at the sight of pulse rifles. The issue with denoting Cameron's film as a trivial gun show is that the real message of the copious amounts of fire power this film showcases becomes muted. The message here being that as technology has advanced, so have our methods of killing – yet no matter how state of the art the marines' fire power, they are still no match for the absolutely deadly organic nature of the alien species. Layering all of these concepts on top of each other, Cameron creates one of the greatest science fiction-action epics ever crafted – but where did this all begin?

PART 2: *ALIEN*

It's All About LV-426

James Cameron's *Aliens* was my first foray into the decades spanning, sinister Xenomorph film franchise, but it wasn't long before I would be shocked and awestruck in a completely different way after seeing Ridley Scott's precursor, *Alien*. One of the greatest things about watching these films in reverse order is that after seeing Scott's production, I not only came to realize and appreciate the different direction that Cameron took in *Aliens*, but also how little of the specific universe that Scott's preliminary slasher-in-space flick is involved in *Aliens*.

Seeing the place where the ultimate threat to mankind mysteriously originates from (LV-426), Ripley's life 57 years before her ill-fated hypersleep and the dark, unexplainable and altogether fascinating derelict space craft carrying these monsters was both revelatory and bewildering. Suddenly the well done, but still narrow, focus that Cameron's *Aliens* thrives off of became something much grander and played into a story far deeper and darker than I had ever imagined. From its very beginning, the stark visuals of *Alien* show that Scott was creating a center of focus far different than Cameron's 'gun porn'/marines-in-space science fiction, survival adventure. Still, the best way to understand the brilliance of *Alien* is comprehending the moment in which it was born.

Let's start in 1979, in space the final and well-travelled frontier where more than a half century of science fiction films have made it very difficult for directors and script writers alike to produce new and ingenious visions of the future. George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) is one of the oldest, and remarkably well known, films ever made – and it's no surprise that this early motion picture grounds itself firmly in the science fiction genre. In its 14-minute running time, Méliès follows a group of astronomers who at the whim of the on-screen president take a trip to the Moon in a bullet shaped capsule fired from a gigantic cannon and encounter wacky aliens on their journey. As incredible and dated as Méliès' vision of futuristic technology seems, it's still very interesting to consider that more than half a century later the work of directors like Fred M. Wilcox (*Forbidden Planet*), Stanley Kubrick (2001: *A Space Odyssey*), and Ridley Scott

show that the allure of imagining how humans fit into the grand scheme of the universe hadn't died.

Yet, although Méliès managed to create one of the most spectacular silent films ever made, this early start didn't exactly secure the science fiction genre's longevity in the film industry. For the many decades that would follow *A Trip to the Moon*, science fiction was stashed away in the same on screen groupings that horror cinema had been confined to: the B-movies. It's important to remember that before films like 2001, science fiction movies were typically low budget, poorly acted filler pieces often outdone and ultimately outshone by the blinding marquees of the big studio era films being pumped out. This is why 2001, released only one year before man would *actually* walk on the Moon, was so integral to the development of the latter part of the twentieth century science fiction film genre and irrefutably vital to *Alien*. Released in 1968, Kubrick's psychedelic space symphony 2001 was, at the time, the most realistic depiction of space travel that the world had ever seen. Using a cinema that had so long neglected tackling the immense and nearly inconceivable nature of our cosmos and the dark cocooning effects of deep space, Kubrick proved to the public and studios that many of the seemingly burnt out concepts of space travel and extra-terrestrial life had yet to be adequately explored and complemented using film. 2001 is also influential in reinvigorating an essential sci-fi trope long taken for granted: Artificial Intelligence. Where robots and machines have generally been seen as banal, menacing, yet still ultimately inferior, 2001's HAL 9000 A.I. unit easily goes down as one of the most sinister and malaise inducing movie villains of all time.

HAL is significant because never before had the public seen a machine created in the likes of a human mind that could be so calculating, so exact and so damn smart. This is an important rapport that Scott picks up on in *Alien*, but now I'm getting ahead of myself.

Our next stop on sci-fi cinema memory lane comes in 1977, with the release of George Lucas' space opera to rule all space operas, *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

To be honest, the plot of *Star Wars* doesn't scream the makings of ingenious science fiction. Space farmer boy joins rebel forces, almost falls in love with his twin sister, gets his hand cut off by his dad and is trained in the Jedi arts by a creepy old guy who calls himself Obi Wan Kenobi; it doesn't quite present a mind bending, universal odyssey. But still, *Star Wars*' importance has a lot less to do with its less than revolutionary science fiction ideas and more with its mythical blockbuster proportions. *Star Wars*' colossal box office success (that continues to increase every time a film from this franchise gets 'remastered') showed studios that there was a new widespread interest in science fiction cinema and, with this, the potential for blockbuster results.

Okay, so what does this all have to do with *Alien*? Simple: the climate for science fiction film in 1979 drastically changed from overcast and cloudy to bright and beautiful and, with this, it was possible for a film like *Alien* to be made. Coming off the coattails of his first major motion picture, *The Duelists* (1977), Scott signed on to the sci-fi/horror film benchmark *Alien*, which was originally co-written by Dan O'Bannon (*Dark Star*) and Ronald Shusett (*Total Recall*). Although the script was graciously reworked by David Giler (*The Money Pit*) and Walter Hill (*The Warriors*), *Alien*'s premise (an alien creature terrorizing a small crew on a deep space voyage) doesn't seem like anything different than what Méliès wanted to show in 1902. However, Scott's film took science fiction in a surprisingly new direction, and this is because it harnessed the vision and integrity that *2001* and *Star Wars* made popular, but added in a dash of horror to its concoction, making it something all of its own.

Although Scott has said that while *2001* and *Star Wars* greatly influenced his direction, another film was Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). This macabre influence, teamed with nightmarish designs by Swedish conceptual artist H.R. Giger, give *Alien* a horrific atmosphere and the film's opening sequence translates this dread perfectly. The eerie stillness of deep space and the ghostly, deadened space craft that floats through it quickly reappropriates the genre, in probably the smartest move that Scott could have made to distance this science fiction film from anything that had come before. We're told that the craft, the *Nostromo*, which literally looks like a floating oil rig, is in fact a commercial towing vehicle and we are given details on its crew numbers, cargo and course. All this seems quite standard, but the delivery of this information perfectly embodies the cold, strictly

scientific detachment that acts as the foundation of *Alien*'s torrid warning of the dangers of human curiosity. Although Scott has said he was greatly inspired by *2001*,



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there is no doubt that once we enter the Nostromo's dark industrial innards, *Alien* dismantles the sleek, well-lit and commercial look that films like *2001* and *Star Wars* made the futuristic norm. Instead, Scott places us on a ship that looks like one giant engine – a place certainly less human-friendly than the clean futuristic space we've seen before.

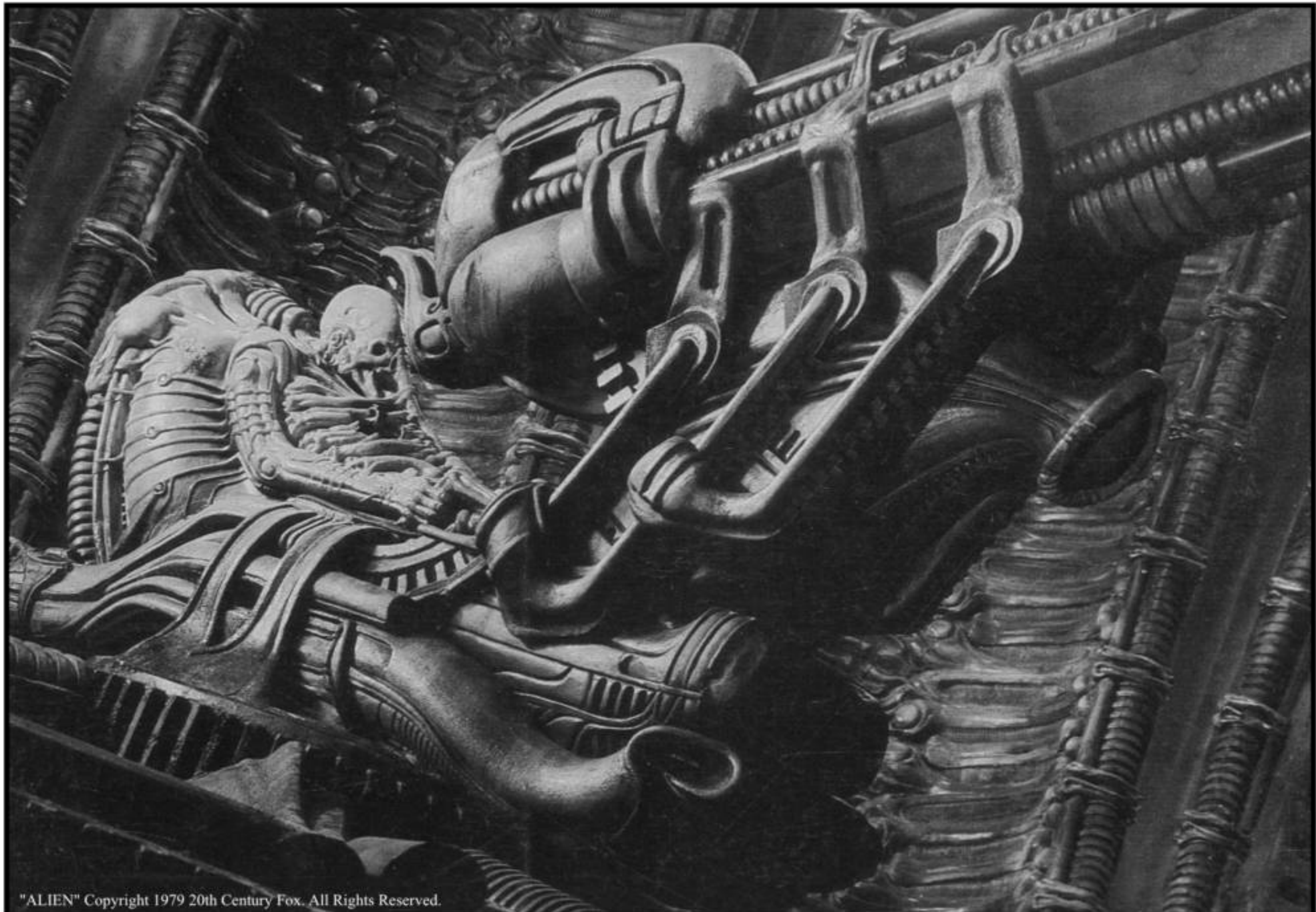
It's not long until we see the groggy crew awakened from a long hypersleep, and as they gather in the Nostromo's mess hall it's possible to notice an uncanny, yet completely authentic chemistry amongst

the cast. Similarly to Cameron's grunts, Captain Dallas (Tom Sekrirt), Warrant Officer Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), Chief Navigator Lambert (Veronica Cartwright), Engineers Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) and Parker (Yaphet Kotto), Executive Officer Kane (John Hurt) and the covert android Ash (Ian Holm) indeed have a connection. However, as Brett and Parker constantly quarrel with the rest of the crew about their pay and Ripley and Lambert's relationship with the men seems quite tense, it becomes clear that unlike the general camaraderie that Cameron crafts amongst the grunts in *Aliens*, the feelings that underline the Nostromo's passengers is outright apprehension. When the Nostromo picks up on an undecipherable beacon from an unknown craft on LV-426 (later revealed to be a warning signal), the real terror begins as the crew realizes that they are nowhere close to home but in fact have been woken by the Nostromo's Hal 9000 reminiscent A.I. unit, Mother.

When Ash and other crew members remind those who don't want to go down to LV-426 of Weyland-Yutani's strict orders to investigate any sign of extraterrestrial intelligence or risk forfeiture of their pay, *Alien* begins to touch on one of its most unique aspects. Behold the business of space: as the protocols and procedures that Ripley, Ash, and other crew members use to push their agendas removes the fantastical sense of our cosmos, we are situated in just another corporate arena. *Alien* beats it into



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our heads that although we now explore the seemingly limitless bounds of the universe, humans have already come to a point where their rules and regulations have invaded this infinite and seemingly ungovernable darkness.

And all this adds to one of *Alien*'s most central ideas: the sense of fearless curiosity that defines our innately human tendencies. When Dallas, Lambert and Kane finally concede to drop down to LV-426 to investigate the spacecraft, Scott delivers some of the juiciest moments in science fiction cinema. Using grainy, eerie P.O.V. cameras (again, a feature that Cameron monopolized in *Aliens*), we watch as the search team descends into the baffling derelict spacecraft, entering its cavernous walls. With corridors wrapped in the nightmarish secretions of the Xenomorph species, we come to see this alien ship almost as a living, breathing vessel now dead and uninhabited for some spectral reason.

Watching the film again, Kane's overt curiosity may seem funny (he puts his face right inside of the alien egg), he's unafraid of the cyclopean 'space jockey' who they find and unknowingly identify as a victim of the more deadly aliens, and is first to volunteer to go into the cavernous cargo hold that houses thousands of alien eggs. But this bravado is actually an important commentary, as Kane's overt confidence accentuates the exact position of humans at this point: so comfortable with space travel that the unidentified no longer terrifies, but instead excites.

One of the best things about *Alien*, is that the alien creature isn't the only malicious being on the ship – Ash proves to be deadly all on his own. With a hidden agenda that sets the precedent for Burke's sly motives in *Aliens*, Ash's attack on Ripley may be even more terrifying than the alien itself. After discovering Ash's ulterior programmed motives to bring back the seed of this biological weapon to end all weapons, Ripley is attacked by a malfunctioning Ash – who can only be stopped when his head is smashed off. With some spectacular suspense and bodily horror (Kane's chest burster scene easily goes down as one of the most horrifying scenes in cinema) *Alien* leaps over many of the tall boundaries imposed on science fiction films.

Still, it's Ripley's survival that makes her the star and central focus of this innately sci-fi film, and as she struggles to battle the menacing star beast, it's clear why Ripley is the badass that she is in *Aliens*. After a harrowing battle with a fully grown Xenomorph, Ripley finally blasts it out into space (for the first time mind you). She's got an instinct for survival, but that doesn't really become absolutely clear until the third installment of the *Alien* series arrives, where we find her in an escape pod drifting hopelessly through space once again.



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PART 3: *ALIEN*³

A DIRECTOR'S WORST NIGHTMARE

Although Ridley Scott's pioneering horror/science fiction masterpiece *Alien* and James Cameron's high-octane popcorn flick sequel *Aliens* come nearly a decade apart, the well-deserved success these films received set an unusually high bar. Creating a sequel that could follow up to *Alien*'s slow creeping and well-crafted terror seemed near impossible, but when Cameron took Scott's ideas and put his own action-packed spin on this one-of-a-kind sci-fi thriller, we saw the best thing that could have happened to the series take place. By making *Aliens* unique and different (both stylistically and plot-wise) in its own right, Cameron transcended the hard-to-top tiers of finesse that *Alien* firmly set in place. Most importantly, *Aliens*' success set the precedent and created the possibility for this sequel to become part of an exciting trilogy, promising the potential for a new direction and story that would further explore the Xenomorph species' space-bound havoc.

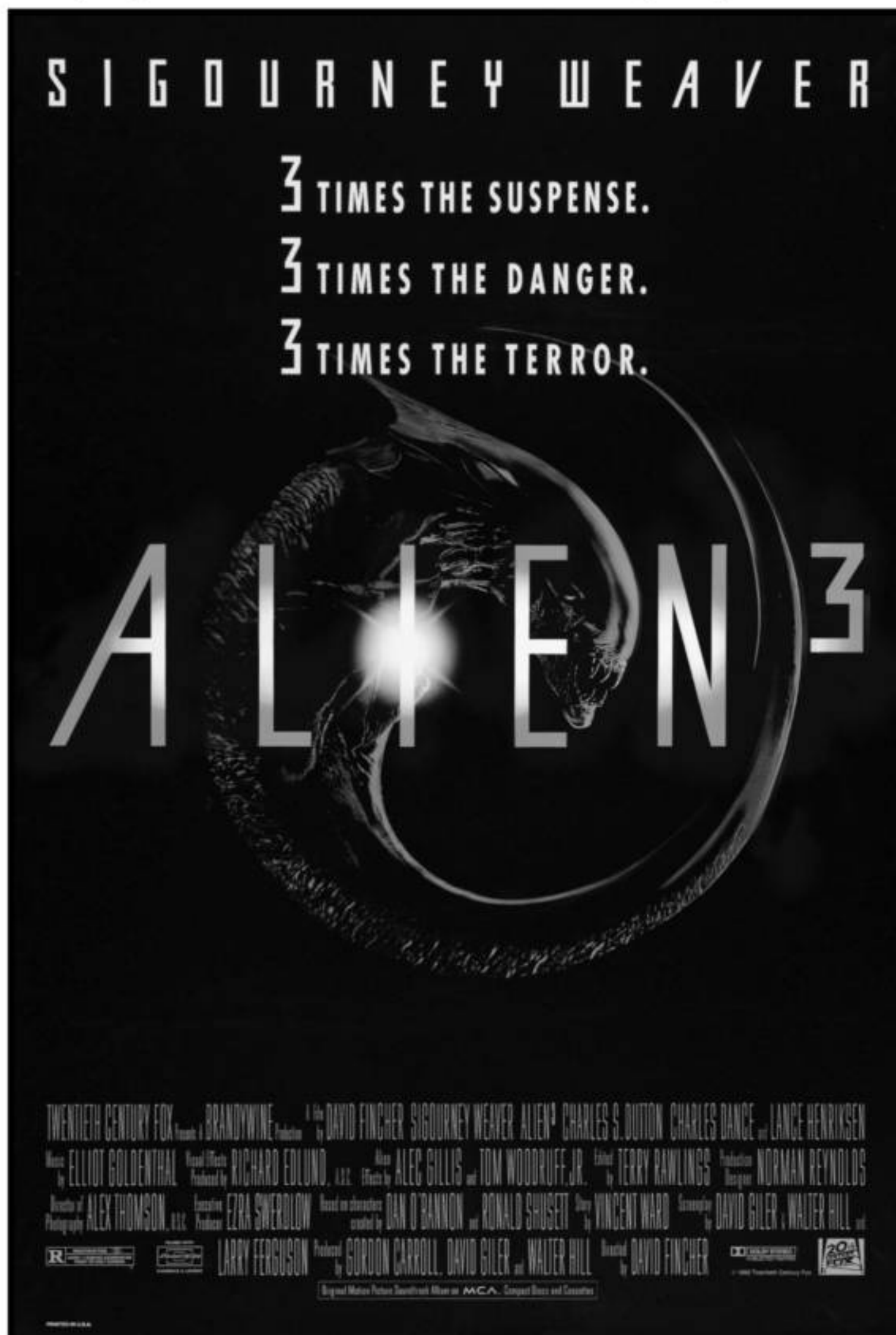
Alien 3 arrived in 1992 and had an infamously difficult production story. After numerous script rewrites, director Renny Harlin (*Die Hard 2*) left the project and was replaced by a very green David Fincher (*Seven*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) who started the shoot without a finished script on hand. *Alien 3* turned out to be a nightmare far worse than anything that the alien creature was capable of. It's notable that *Alien 3* is remembered by most as the morosely entertaining David Fincher's first feature film, a film that Fincher walked from during post-production. The doomed production shook Fincher back to making music videos before daring to sit in the director's chair again some years later with *Seven*.

Still, *Alien 3* is undeniably Fincher in all of its visual appeal – a neat fact which only years of age could give us enough distance to appreciate. Through a montage that looks like it could be part of a Madonna music video, *Alien 3*'s opening titles quickly explain the fates of Corporal Hicks, android Bishop, Ripley, and young Newt, who we left drifting back to Earth in hypersleep at the conclusion of *Aliens*. But with an introduction like this, the onset of *Alien 3* already poses a very big threat to its individual success: the opening to

this film is remarkably *unremarkable*, as the past *Alien* films have placed us at fascinating starting points to their tales of outer space terrors. *Alien* shows us Ripley and crew being mysteriously woken up from hypersleep to answer an ominous and blatantly inhuman warning beacon, *Aliens* has us finding Ripley awoken only to find out she has been adrift for years, but *Alien 3*'s opening sequence leaves much less to the imagination. Instead we are shown these happenings in a slap dash fashion. What's this? Someone on the Sulaco has been infected by an alien facehugger? A life boat has been deployed? Ripley washes up on the rough sands of an unidentified planet? The fast and less than typically intelligent Fincher-opening of *Alien 3* makes us say "Oh, what a shame," instead of the "oh damn!" that a slow plotted release of this information could have potentially elicited.

With an opening and back story that is so straightforward, *Alien 3* sets an uncharacteristically low standard for its viewers who have become well acquainted (and I guess privileged) with prior *Alien* films that caused jaws to hang to the floor and left us slobbering to find out why, when, and where exactly we have been set. From a strictly plot oriented sense, the introduction to *Alien 3* is quite flawed, however where cinematic interests are chiefly concerned the opening sequence to *Alien 3* is absolutely breathtaking. Once the *Sulaco* lifeboat is jettisoned into space, Fincher means to take the last remnants of the hard to forget *Aliens* mission and send these pieces into the unknown and, visually speaking, *Alien 3* does a formidable job at doing just this. The imagery of the lifeboat's fall to this mysterious planet, later known as Fiorina 'Fury' 161, appears as if something precious falling is from the heavens, a really awe-inspiring and suitably biblical imagining. And this feeling is intensified when the barely alive Ripley washes up on the shores, covered in oil, only to be picked up and quickly brought into a large and unexplained industrial facility. During this scene, when facility doctor Clemens (Charles Dance) carries Ripley into the foundry, I remember turning up the volume on my speakers several times until I finally realized that Ripley's rescuers carry out a purposefully inaudible conversation. It's here that *Alien 3* sets its boldest, and unfortunately *only*, foundation: this film is concerned with a sense of unspoken spiritualism, and the opening sequence sets Ripley's ethereal fall to Fiorina as part of a transcendental experience.

We learn that Ripley has crash landed on the shores of an all-male penal colony housing child molesters, rapists, and men with 'double-Y' chromosome patterns; being a female, Ripley is positioned further as something of a messiah. Fincher's sacred undertones are innovative, smart and in line with the series' penchant for secular ingenuity. However, *Alien 3* has quite a bit of trouble supporting its pacing. Even the interesting and equally demented characters Ripley meets in





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the colony, such as spiritual leader Dillon (Charles S. Dutton) and creepy, yet helpful, facility doctor Clemens, can't adequately propel this story which, after a while, appears to be going nowhere.

If there is anything that *Alien 3* can really be praised for, it is undoubtedly its expansion and exploration of Ripley's complex character. The last two films of the series had us come to understand Ellen Ripley in vastly different ways. With *Alien* making her the unsuspected final girl/hero, and *Aliens* the badass "take no shit" lady who would be the only person to make a final stance against the Xenomorphs. *Alien 3*'s positioning Ripley as being the only female on Fiorina certainly highlights her feminine traits, which is something that Ripley's circumstances in the past two films have denied us. When Ripley approaches Dillon's (the self-proclaimed 'rapist of women') table in the mess hall and tensely sits down, *Alien 3* shows that the Ripley on Fiorina is much different than the typically rebellious and strictly survival oriented warrior woman that we've become acquainted with. Possibly because Ripley's survived two Xenomorph holocausts, both times coming out as the sole survivor, or maybe because Ripley has no other friend in the universe (not even Jonesy), the broken Ripley in *Alien 3* seems guided by an almost divine faith in the order of things.

Definitely the most telling of Ripley's character development is her

telling Clemens "I've been out here a long time," before a cut to their post sex scene. No *Alien* film before, and none after for the matter, has ever featured a scene with Ripley even remotely expressing sexual interest in another crew member, but *Alien 3* breaks this cycle to give us something undeniably different: Ripley as a real human being. The *Alien* series has shown us that in space many of our most basic human instincts and emotions don't matter, and further that the vast darkness of the cosmos simply doesn't care about us. *Alien 3* doesn't necessarily push for something different in that sense, but seeing Ripley's guard eventually broken down indeed puts her in a newly vulnerable position.



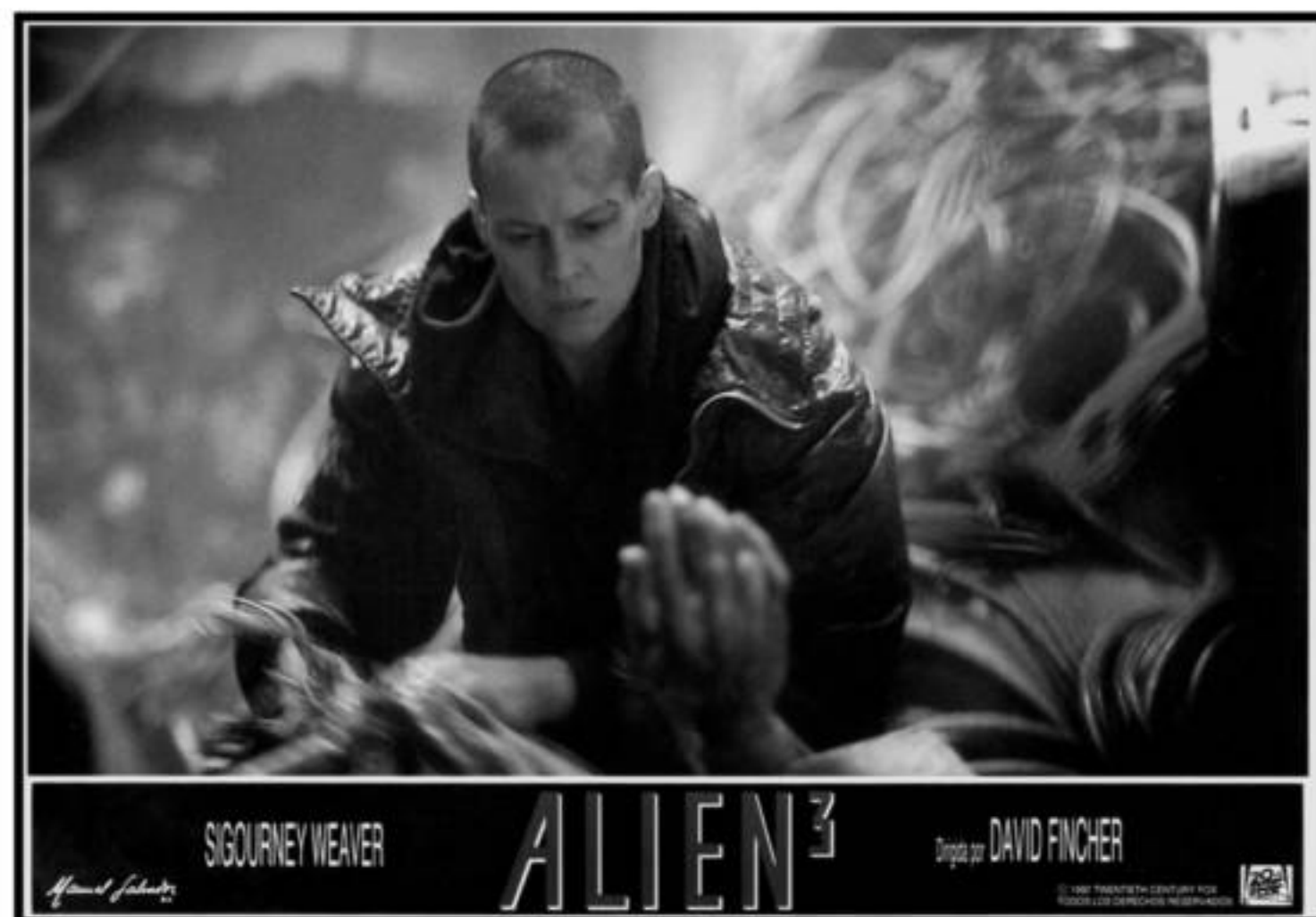
SIGOURNEY WEAVER

ALIEN³

Directed by DAVID FINCHER



All this aside, *Alien 3*'s real down fall comes from its use of the alien creature and the film makes a fatal mistake where all other *Alien* films have managed to triumph. Spawning from a dog (and in the director's cut an ox), the alien creature in *Alien 3* looks like a Window's 95 masterpiece, and that's being generous. The poorly computer generated creature in *Alien 3* looks ridiculous, fake, and not altogether scary. This is a shame because this film is the first in the series to show us what the results of a Xenomorph bred animal would be, and with designs by H.R. Giger (who has had a long standing and bitter legal battle with 20th Century Fox for being unaccredited for his work on the *Alien 3*) *Alien 3*



disappoints because of its lack of creativity.

If *Alien 3* makes any horror clear, it's the setbacks of the 'production hell' that so many directors fear. With numerous alternate scripts and story ideas, the at times confused notion of the film makes it obvious that it is the culmination of many different sources. Despite these flaws, Fincher's auteur treatment of *Alien 3* managed to spawn some of the most memorable imagery of the whole quadrilogy and definitely the most intense ending in the whole series. Sacrificing herself in order to save the universe from the Alien Queen lodged in her chest, Ripley's messiah-type role comes full circle as Fincher puts a would-be lid on this lesson in science fiction driven terror. But anyone who knows the films of the *Alien* series would be smart to remember that although Ripley appears to have died on screen, resurrection is no hard task for the universe's greatest threat.

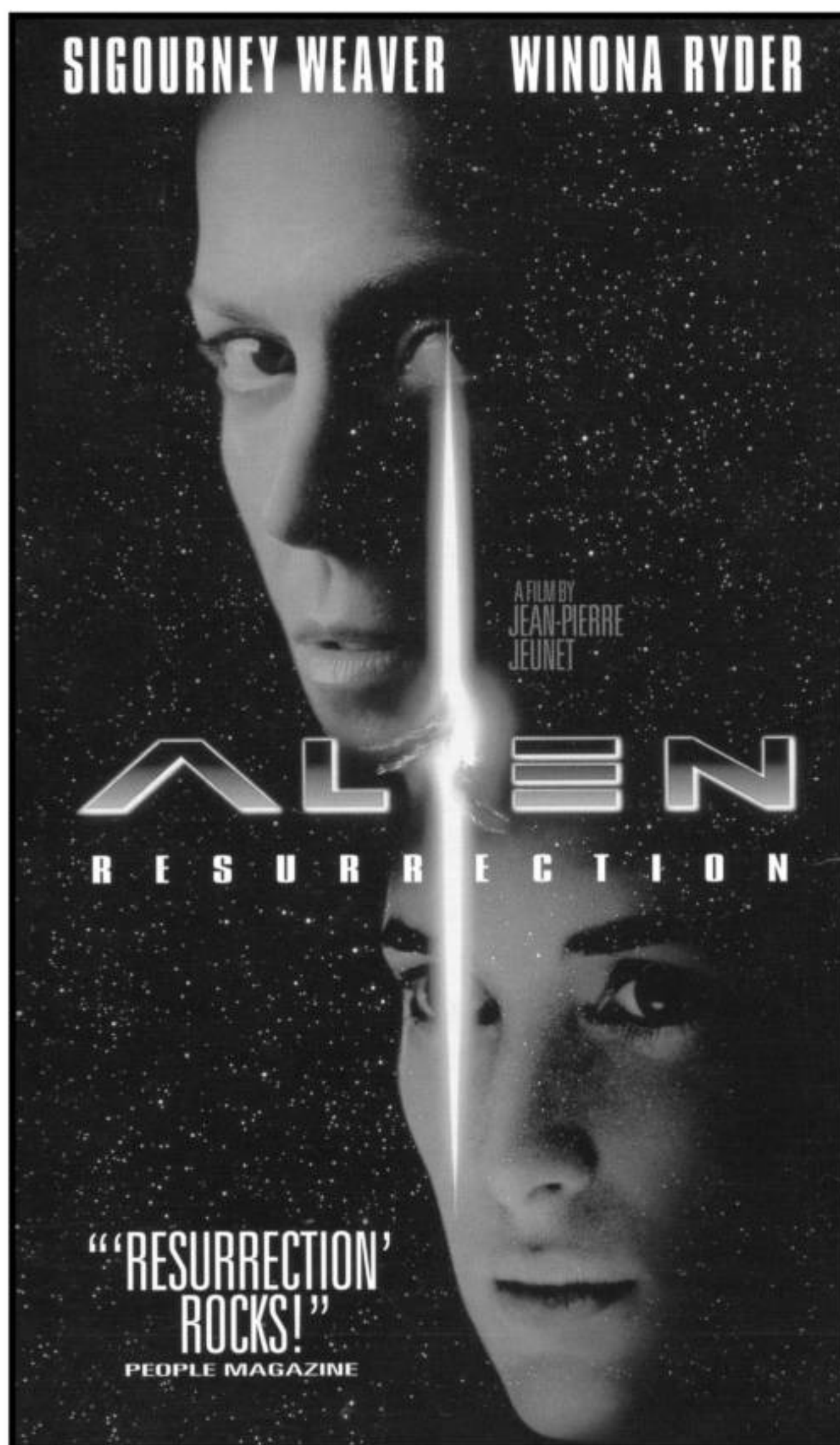
PART 4: *ALIEN* *RESURRECTION* CAMP HORROR GOES TO SPACE

After the release of the colossal mess that was *Alien 3*, fans thought that this sordid spacefaring adventure had reached its inevitable climax. With lead character Ellen Ripley tossing herself into a vat of molten lead after a nearly century long battle with the deadly Xenomorph species, it's hard to imagine how any director could follow up such a finite conclusion.

At this time, I was just one of the many *Alien* fans who felt slighted, let down and underwhelmed by the sloppy finale of this epic saga. That's why when 20th Century Fox began pursuing writers and directors to work on a fourth entry in 1997, fans and skeptics alike were shocked to learn that there was any desire to literally resurrect this withering saga.

We've come to the final junction in this space horror odyssey, and unlike any of any of the other *Alien* incarnations, *Alien: Resurrection* has no real preface. Since this film was only an afterthought, for both the studios and any assigned directors alike, there is no direct influence carrying over from the series it whimsically caps off. For this reason it's arguable that *Alien: Resurrection* is the most original, free-flowing film of the sequels following *Alien*. *Alien: Resurrection* exists in an odd vacuum of space, where intentional campiness meets the digitally-obsessed science fiction entertainment standards of the millennium. It's for this reason that *Alien: Resurrection* continues to be an undervalued, modern masterpiece of amalgamated styles, causes and direction.

Right off the bat, the opening sequence of *Alien: Resurrection* says something grand about what this film proposes to do. Loftily sitting in a spacecraft cockpit, a large computer



generated fly is sardonically squished by the ship's dopey looking driver. Similar to the other films in the series, director Jean-Pierre Jeunet infers quite a bit of information with these unspoken actions. Once again, it's established that we are in a time when space travel is so common that flies buzz around cockpits, and pilots look like slack-jawed yokels instead of debonair space men of sophistication.

But what this scene most importantly rectifies is the specific, and never before used angle Jeunet approaches the series from. There's something funny about this interaction and indeed a sense of overarching, dark humour looms over the rest of the film. There is one person to thank for this, and that is the talented Mr. Joss Whedon.

Fox signed Whedon, then just the creator and front man of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV show, to write the script for this unwarranted sequel.

Since the release of his colossal 2012 blockbuster *The Avengers*, the importance of Whedon's early works and writing influence has been greatly magnified. But back in 1997 Whedon was known to the public at large as just a camp-loving fan boy who could write really well. Nevertheless, after several script rewrites at the order of the plot-obsessed studio execs at Fox, it is Whedon's treatment of *Alien*'s principle characteristics that make *Alien: Resurrection* stand so far apart from anything else produced in this series.

After seeing an ominous test tube baby grown into an adult woman, we learn from the ranks of a dozen beady-eyed surgeons that Ellen Ripley, pronounced dead on Fury 161 200 years earlier, has been cloned. After seeing the doctors successfully remove a chest burster from her torso, we discover the implications of Ripley's reincarnation. But unlike *Alien 3*, which had David Fincher piling religious imagery and symbolism into an uneven stack of anti-climactic thrills, Whedon's clear writing and character development prowess shines through in *Alien: Resurrection*.

Revealed to be something more than just a clone, Ripley's character is not only enigmatic to us, but completely unpredictable. As we watch Ripley learn how to speak, menacingly attack doctors and security guards with unexplainable brute strength, we quickly come to realize that this incarnation of Ellen Ripley has nothing to do with the one that died 200 years before. The other *Alien* sequels took great pride in being able to pick up where their predecessors left off, however *Resurrection* throws a cinematic monkey wrench at us by completely disassociating this integral character from her origins and instead recreating her as a beast of a woman, laughing in the face of the Xenomorphs and death.

Pretty soon a new dynamic causes *Resurrection* to change its focus again. Instead of more intense introspection on Ripley's radically different psyche, we're inducted to the world of the roughneck mercenaries manning the *Betty*. It might at first appear that Whedon took a few hints from the testosterone-ridden comradery displayed by the grunts in *Aliens* or the prisoners of *Alien 3* but, once chaos and havoc shift into

full gear, it's possible to comprehend the first glimpses of Whedon's ability to craft campy, yet incredibly adroit stories that still somehow manage to develop serious points. With this in mind, the duality of the mercenaries' purpose in *Resurrection* plays out like a well-choreographed ballet with both fun and pragmatic values. The crew is composed of rebellious young lady Link (Winona Rider), perpetual jerk Johner (Ron Perlman) and several others who have their identities established in a matter of moments. Most notably though, it's Link who stands up to the constantly irate Johner and establishes herself as a take-no-nonsense kind of gal, and yet her presence on the *Betty* is mysterious and not initially explained.

After these seemingly standard character establishments, it may appear



as if the title creatures (this time harvested from the chests of a dozen or so bodies the mercenaries transported to the ship housing the cloned Ripley) have escaped an expectable plot point. As members of both the *Betty's* crew and the military facility are killed off systematically by the resilient Xenomorphs, *Resurrection* assumes the guise of what Whedon's later TV series *Firefly* goes to show his mastery of: campy space horror.

While it may be true that Whedon adopts this formulaic storytelling method for *Resurrection*, the saving grace of this film is what Whedon chose to do with it. The group, scared and paralyzed against the alien threat, is actually saved and then led by Ripley. Using her character as the slasher film's prototypical oracle, who delivers knowledge and mysterious hints from a shadowy place, it's Ripley's telekinetic link to the aliens that leads her to become the groups' only insight against these unpredictable creatures. For once, it's the systemically terrorized Ellen Ripley who is in complete control, and the best part is that she knows it too.

Whedon also does some worthwhile things with the overall development of the alien species. The new Alien Queen, a cross between Xenomorph and human DNA, no longer produces thousands of eggs – her offspring are now birthed from her womb. Not since Fincher's failed attempt to recreate the alien creature in *Alien 3* has any other film of this series tackled the difficult task of successfully modifying the *Alien* concept H.R. Giger crafted nearly 30 years before. Featuring a disturbing mixture of human and alien features, the results of Whedon's concoction are mind blowing.

The Xenomorph, known to growl with distrust, now has facial features and clearly expresses pain, discomfort and frustration as a human would. By doing this, Whedon caused the mysterious alien species, and



series, locked in the same animalistic trappings for nearly three decades to transcend into a new found cognisance.

An earlier, shorter version of this article first appeared on DorkShelf.com. It has been reprinted with permission and has since been revised and expanded by the author.

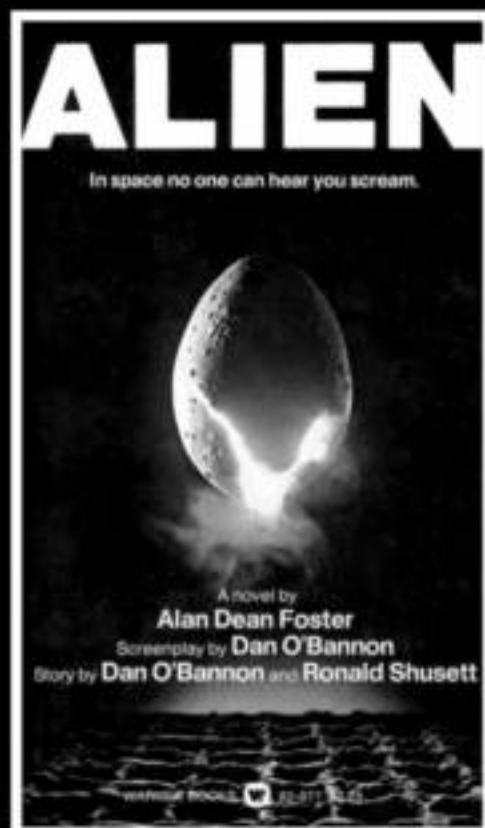


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ALIEN COLLECTIBLES



Nowadays, nearly every popular sci-fi, fantasy and horror franchise has a dedicated line of action figures, model kits, comics and assorted collectibles. This had been a foreign concept prior to the 1970s, until *Star Wars* set the standard – and revealed the potential – of what could be achieved with large product tie-ins. In 1979 this tactic was tried with *Alien*; a variety of items were offered, most aimed at younger kids, despite *Alien* being an R-rated film geared for adults. As could be expected, many of these products caused an uproar with parents and have since become highly sought-after collectibles.



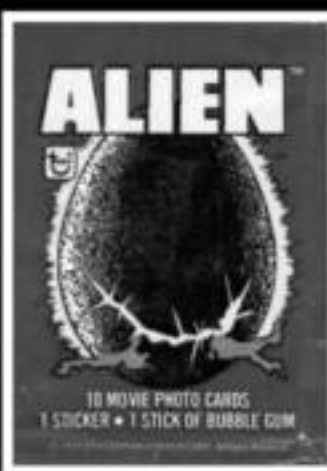
Left:
Warren Publications official
movie magazine.

Right:
Iron-on
patch.



Below:
Alien: The
Illustrated
Story graphic
novel.

Above:
Novel
adaptation.



Above:
100-piece puzzle.

Left:
Topps
trading
cards.



Above:
MPC 9-inch
plastic model kit.



Left:
Ben Cooper
Halloween costume.

Below:
'Alien Blaster'
target set.

Left: Kenner 'Movie
Viewer'.



Above: Kenner 18-inch Alien
action figure.



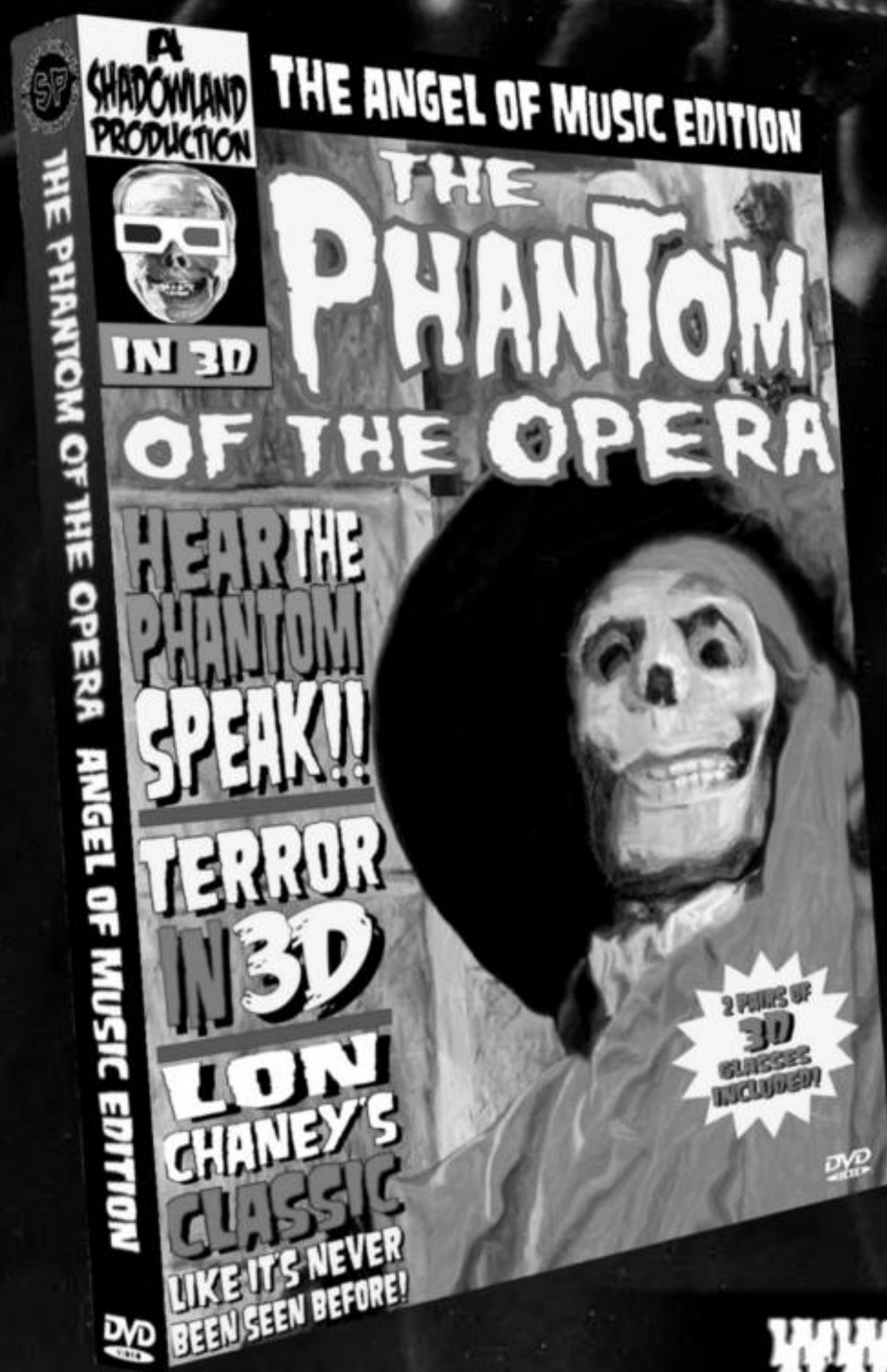
Right & Below:
Alien board game.





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JAPAN'S ULTIMATE ASSASSIN

By FRANK WARDEN

Duke Togo is the deadliest man alive, his bullets never miss their mark, he's skilled with every known firearm – and, most of all, don't stand behind him if you value your life. Among those seeking his professional skills, Togo is better known as Golgo 13, the world's leading assassin-for-hire.

Golgo 13 first began as a Japanese manga series in 1969, written and illustrated by Takao Saito. The series follows the exploits of Duke Togo as he takes on various missions to assassinate his designated target. These adventures often lead him to a string of action-packed confrontations with a variety of memorable enemies.

Unlike American comics at the time, which favored superheroes, Togo was strictly a hired-gun – a hitman. It wouldn't be until 1974 when Marvel Comics introduced the Punisher, a loose-cannon vigilante that employed drastic measures to bring down criminals, that the standard superhero mold was shattered and comics shifted into edgier territory. But, compared to Golgo 13, the Punisher may as well have been an Archie

Comics regular (an unlikely title the Marvel character would later make a guest appearance in). Togo was no hero by any stretch of the imagination. The manga made no reservations about basking the character in a world of sex and violence – and it didn't matter who he trained his custom scoped M16 on, as long as the job paid.

The longest running manga in history, *Golgo 13* is still being published on a regular basis. Since its inception, the character has become a cultural phenomenon in Japan. In 1973 a live-action adaptation was made for





the big screen, starring Ken Takakura as Duke Togo. A year later Takakura would co-star with Robert Mitchum in Sydney Pollack's neo-noir gangster film, *The Yakuza*. A second live-action feature, *Golgo 13: Assignment Kowloon*, was produced in 1977 with martial arts legend Sonny Chiba assuming the role of the title character.

In 1983 *Golgo 13*'s daring escapades would be translated into a third film, this time via animation. Titled *Golgo 13: The Professional* for the North American release, the anime served as an introduction to the character for many American viewers. It was also one of the first animated films to utilize CGI animation

decades without his own. Finally, in 2008, a *Golgo 13* series was brought to Japan's popular TV Tokyo channel, lasting 50 episodes. It was imported to the United States through Sentai Filmworks in 2010.

Aside from a few cameo appearances in commercials and a radio drama, *Golgo 13* has also tested his skills in the realm of video games. Six games were released in Japan, with two of them making

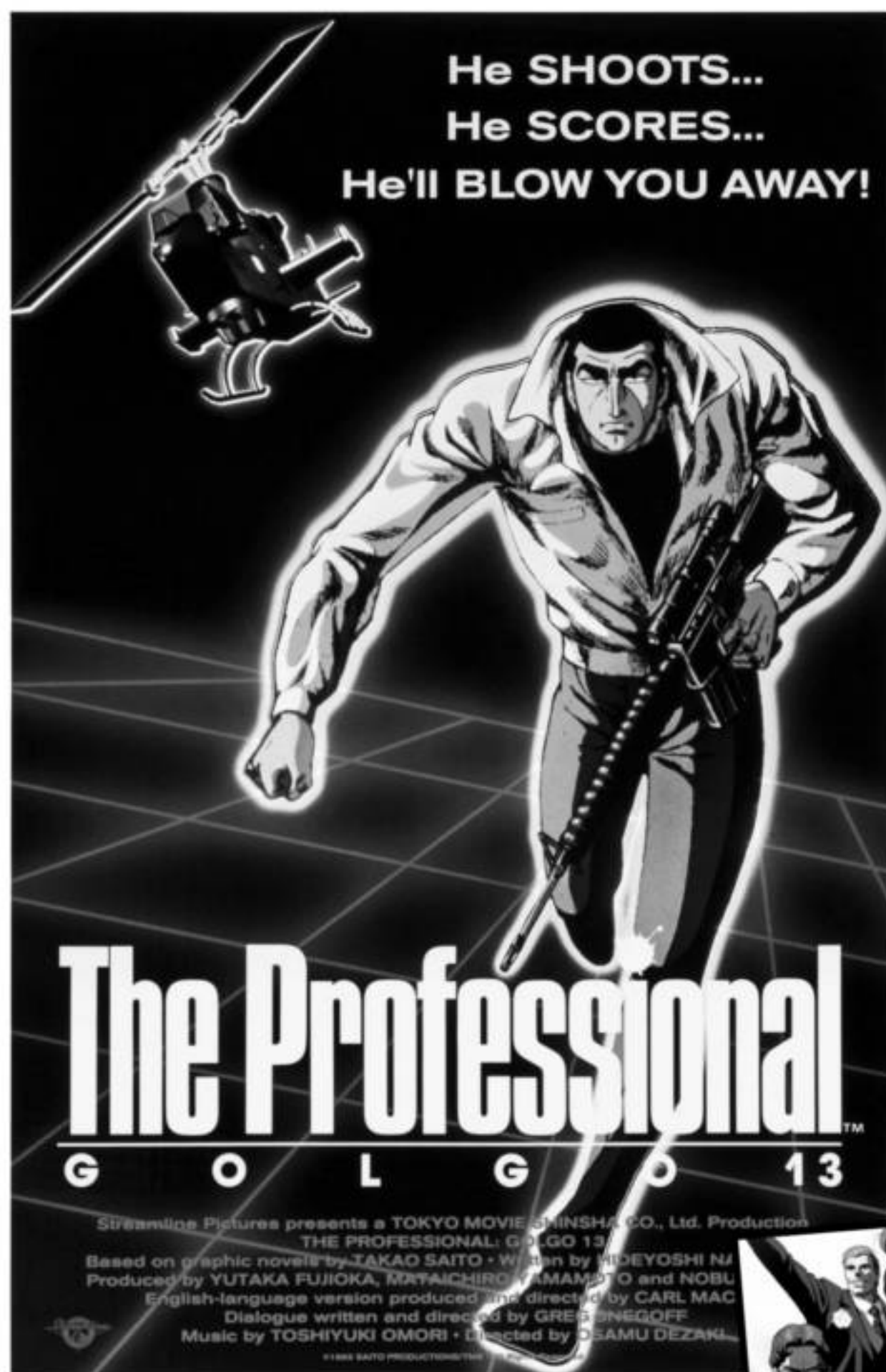


it to America. The first one to be imported, *Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode*, arrived on the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1988, with extreme examples of violence, sexual content, and drug use being toned down significantly. A sequel, and only other *Golgo 13* game imported abroad, was *The Mafat Conspiracy*



in 1990, also for the NES. As with the first game, edits and censorship was enacted but, even so, it remains one of the most graphic games on the original Nintendo console.

What lies in Duke Togo's future? Another anime series? More live-action films? With the manga still ongoing, it's evident that the character continues to be a relevant force in Japanese pop culture. Fortunately, some of the manga has been translated into English starting back in the late 1980s, with the most recent being Viz Media's 2006 Signature collection, which imported a fittingly-numbered thirteen volumes. Regardless of the many years of *Golgo 13* stories, little is known about the character's past or personal background, but fans can always count on his stoic personality and his astonishing skills with a sniper rifle. And as long as he never misses a shot, *Golgo 13* will always be Japan's ultimate assassin, acclaimed the world over.



for a scene near the film's riveting climax.

Golgo 13 fans would have to be content with just the manga until 1998, when Togo returned to anime form in the OVA (original video animation) *Golgo 13: Queen Bee*. Considering how many manga titles get their own on-going anime series, it seemed odd that Japan's premiere assassin went



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Shadowland will be returning to the Batcave with a retrospective on Batman 1966. We'll also take a ride with the Headless Horseman for an overview of the many films to use Sleepy Hollow's infamous galloping ghost. Better get your birthday hats ready for King Kong's 80th anniversary, as we take notice of his cinematic 'Kongquests', including the 1933 original all the way to Peter Jackson's CGI extravaganza. And so much more on the way - don't miss it!

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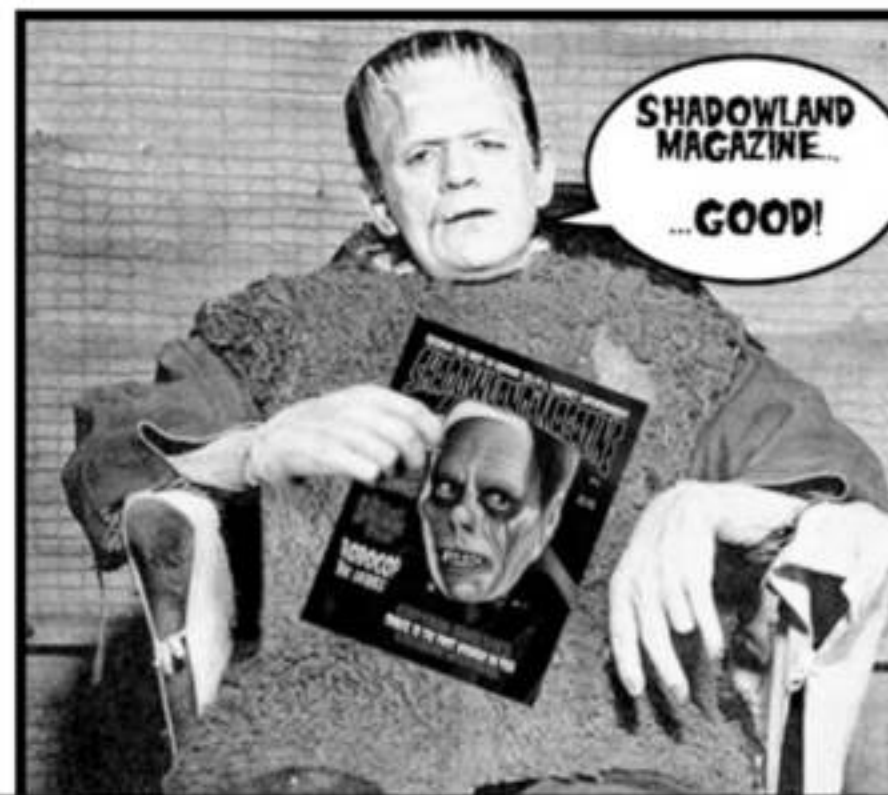
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POE ON FILM

LITERARY BIOGRAPHIES AND MYSTERIES

THE RAVEN

January 1845

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door -
Only this, and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore -
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore -
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door -
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; -
This it is, and nothing more.'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' - here I opened wide the door;
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!
Merely this, and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window;
How then, what thereat is, and this mystery
Let my heart eat, and when I have heard, I will tell you -
'Tis the wind and nothing more.'

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

THE "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal -- the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of the castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent building, the work of centuries of artists and architects. It had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought their weapons and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of escape nor of sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was so constructed that such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to. It could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to have provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were ball-rooms, there were salons, there were balliet-dancers, there were musicians, there were singers, there were all these and security were within. Without was the "Red

fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the broad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand guests in the most unusual magnificence.

But first let me tell of the rooms in which the Imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites of rooms are not to be found. The whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was different. The vision embraced but little more than one room, and that room was twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel and strange scene was revealed. The tall and narrow Gothic window

Edgar A. Poe,

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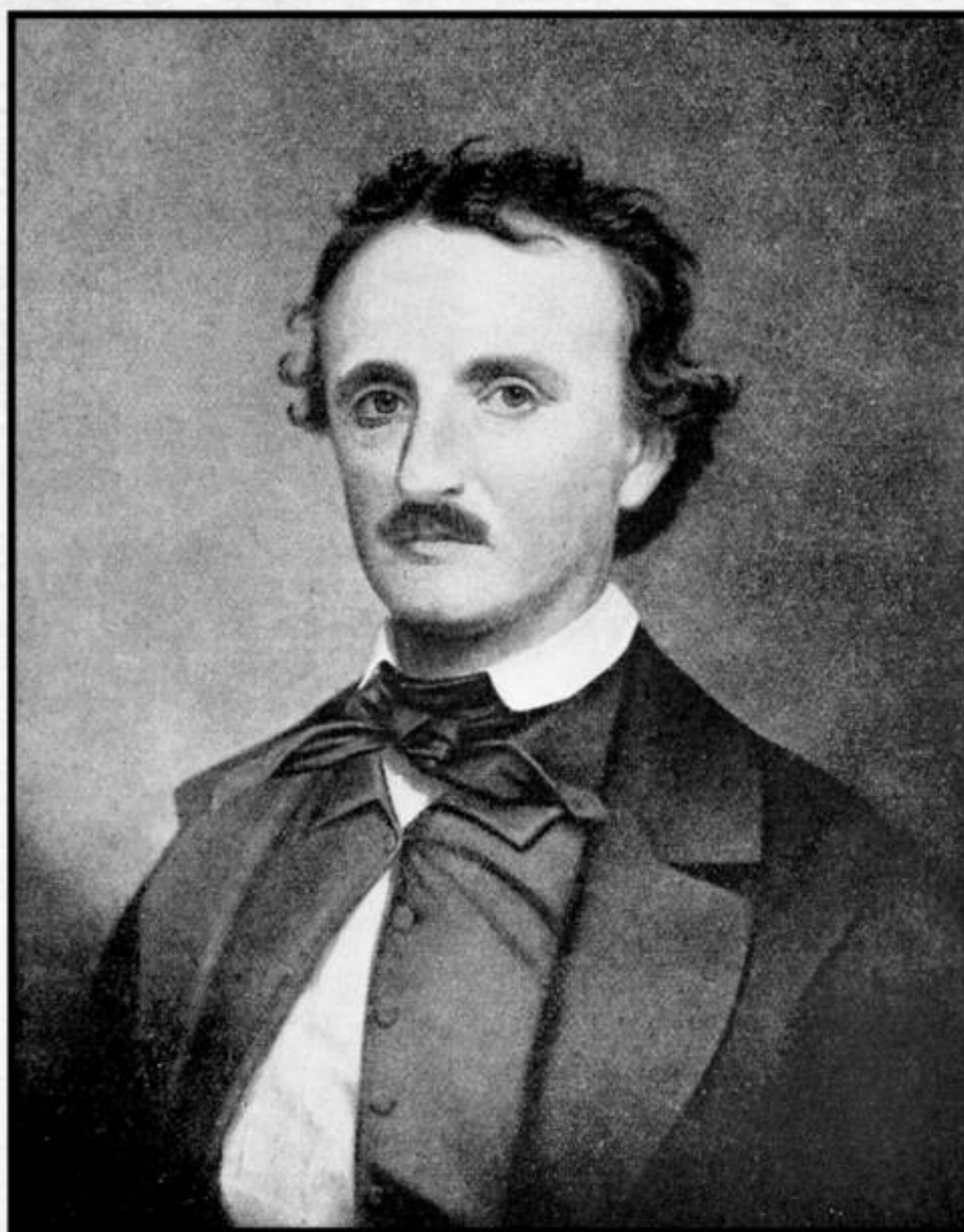
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BY BRETT TAYLOR

Who was Poe? A demented fiend driven to fits of madness by unseen specters? A doomed yet dashing romantic? A sneering, defiant critic? He was probably all these things, and the movies have given us all these visions of the famed author. One thing's for sure, Poe was the first American writer to attain celebrity status, though unluckily for him this didn't lead to fortune. In his day, Edgar Allan Poe was instantly acclaimed for the popular poem "The Raven," still anthologized in textbooks across the land. Children would recognize the author in the street, and he would reward them by playfully declaiming the famous line "Nevermore!" Also popular was the adventure story "The Gold Bug." Today he is just as often remembered for the gruesome works "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," for it was he who moved Gothic dread out of European castles and into ordinary American settings. Whereas Byron and Goethe romanticized a life of despair, Poe lived it. Unlike his well-heeled forebears, Poe had no fortune to fall back on, and thus ended his life drunkenly wandering the street, whereupon a mysterious ailment soon overtook him. Poe made many enemies in his lifetime, and they were quick to spread rumors of Poe's madness and debauchery. In fact, Poe was not mad, certainly not all the time, but he came close whenever moved to drink, for alcohol had a dramatic effect on him.

For the French, Poe became the very image of the poète maudit, the doomed outlaw poet. Baudelaire said prayers every day to God and Poe. The surrealists elevated Poe for his feverish writings and the usual Romantic elevation of passion and agonized longing over logic and science. Due to "The Purloined Letter" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe is often called the father of the detective story, what he called "tales of ratiocination," a designation that must rankle anyone who knows that the Chinese were writing detective mysteries years before they became popular in English. Poe sought to bridge the gap between Literature and popular writing, and did so as well as anybody ever has. For some highbrows Poe has always been suspect of the twin crimes of acceptability and popularity. Yeats called "The Raven" vulgar, while Emerson scoffed at Poe as "the jingle jangle man" for his simple, repetitious rhymes. Poe's reputation as the master of the macabre has been reinforced by the many movie adaptations of his works, notably the Roger Corman/AIP drive-in productions of the sixties.

Poe has the most recognizable face of any American writer besides Mark Twain. Who knows what James Fenimore Cooper looked like? It is not surprising that Poe would be the subject



of a number of movies, though it is fairly surprising that only a few actual screen biographies have been made, as opposed to the more numerous thrillers that simply use Poe as a character.

The first screen depiction of the author was D.W. Griffith's *Edgar Allen Poe*, a 1909 silent short. Biograph Studios were in such a rush to meet the centenary of Poe's birth that they didn't have time to check the spelling of his name. (They wouldn't be the last to make this mistake.) Poe flails his arms about in overwrought emotion as his beloved Virginia lies dying, then attempts to cheer her up by showing his latest writing. Herbert Yost's acting looks ridiculously theatrical to a modern audience, as would the entire short, which is filmed entirely in static long shots. An





entire three minutes go by before we cut from the first shot. But Yost certainly looks like Poe, unlike some later actors who have taken the role, and the simple story is heartbreaking enough as Poe faces editorial rejection as well as personal tragedy.

In contrast to the simplicity of Griffith's short is *The Raven* (1915). (This was the second silent short to use the title of Poe's most famed poem. A 1912 film with the same title, apparently starring Guy Oliver as the author, is apparently lost.) The 1915 movie, self-described as "A romance of Edgar Allan Poe," is more a series of sketches than a complete biography. A prologue traces the ancestry of Poe, as John Poe, a long-haired Irishman, immigrates to America. Then there's David Poe, a Davey Crockett-like patriot who furiously clutches a gun at the sight of the British army. Eventually the Poe we all know today is born to two actors. The adult Poe is represented by a painting of what appears to be John Wilkes Booth, before a dissolve takes us to a man who neither resembles Poe nor Booth. Poe rides up on a horse to a country home to carry off his beloved Virginia, who wields a parasol and looks rather portly and matronly. It's hard to say how old she is, as virtually everything is covered in long shot. Romance is represented in corny post-Victorian style with nymphs dancing about and a young boy, presumably Cupid, going up a tree to play pipes, as well



as a man who looks like Robin Hood being stopped from killing a deer. It all takes place "Beside the glassy pool of romance," according to a typically florid title card.

The romance ends when Poe and Virginia meet a man on the road who's brutally beating a slave with a whip. Poe gives the man a \$600 IOU, which of course is never paid. Poe's far too busy drinking in the tavern to pay his debts. A cartoon raven appears as Poe has "dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before." These daring dreams are represented by such images as a cartoon silhouette of a man leaning on a rock labeled WINE while grasping at a vanishing woman.

This melodrama contains all the dated aspects of early film, including using an actor in blackface to represent a slave, but it does contain some good images such as the dusk shot of the makeshift monument used to represent Virginia's burial place and a nice silhouette of Poe writing. The version that turned up on DVD is incongruously set to "Strolling Through the Park One Day."

The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe (1942) was 20th Century Fox's attempt to turn the author's life into a commercial, although tragic, love story. With its cheap but romantic music and emphasis on Poe's Southern upbringing and the accompanying pageantry (i.e. a grand ball), the movie seems like an attempt to cash in on



Gone With the Wind, on a budget and in black and white. It wouldn't be surprising to learn that some of the sets and costumes were left over from that MGM film. Linda Darnell was obviously a big star, as she receives top billing even though she is clearly not the one playing Edgar Allan Poe. This is supposed to be *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe*, right? Not *The Loves of Cousin Virginia*. Even so, the film was made during a lull in her career, when Fox chief Darryl F. Zanuck was punishing Darnell for rejecting his advances by casting her in unpromising roles.

Edgar's actress mother lies dying in bed, though she looks radiant and beautiful. Mrs. Allen, introduced as "the beautiful and childless wife of the town's most prosperous merchant," takes a liking to the dead woman's son and begs of her husband, "Please let me keep him," as though he were a puppy and she a child. Now ten years old, Edgar climbs a dramatic hill where a raven perches on a stark tree. His adoptive father is jealous of him. At school he ignores his old teacher and would rather write a poem to Elmira, a beloved classmate. Students laugh when he is reprimanded, but shut up when he wheels around at them. His father blames his "no good" behavior on actor genes. Standing up for himself, Edgar tells daddy dearest "If you insist on beating me, I shall run away." The portrayal of John Allan as an arrogant villain may be a little exaggerated,

but there's no doubt he was a remote, businesslike parent who showed little affection for the child he refused to acknowledge as his own. Of course, Edgar was a sulky, remote child and would have probably proved difficult for any parent to handle.

Upon maturing into a clean cut Leslie Howard type played by John Shepperd, Poe dates and sketches Elmira, now not just a pianist with blonde curls but "the best-looking girl in Virginia." Played by Virginia Gilmore, Elmira has a grinning old black servant whose dialogue is all along the lines of "Yassir." Unfortunately, Poe's dad has no intention of making the adopted young man his legal heir, and disapproves of the "trash" and "pagan foolishness" Edgar reads, like *Don Quixote*. He refuses to hear Byron's name spoken in his house: "If a man must read poetry, there's Bobby Burns."

Off to the University of Virginia, Poe is noted for guzzling brandy with no attention to taste. Edgar loses \$255 at cards and offers to pay the debt with one of his poems. When a Mr. Dixon insults the poem, the author punches him out. Poe is summoned to the office of the school president, who happens to be none other than Thomas Jefferson. "Whew!" whistles Poe's roommate (Harry Morgan), "Old Independence himself!" Luckily, Old Independence is already familiar with Poe's work, and couldn't sleep after reading "The





Gold Bug.” Asks the founding father, “How did you ever go about writing a tale that kept me in such a stew?” Poe gladly offers, “The recipe is simple, Mr. Jefferson. You take three ingredients. The bizarre, the romantic, and the analytical. Put them all together, shake well, and you have it. The reader’s stew.” This momentous meeting is highly dubious in many ways. First Jefferson had established an idealistic curriculum which trusted the students to govern themselves while at the University of Virginia. As a result, fights and even gunfights were so common as to be little remarked on, as Poe noted in his letters home. Secondly, Poe had yet to publish anything. “The Gold Bug,” the humorous adventure story which is supposed to have kept the founding father awake at night, wouldn’t be published for nearly twenty years after Poe’s admittance at the university, by which time Old Independence had been dead seventeen years.

Banished by his father for refusing to study law and having learned that Elmira is engaged to a Mr. Shelton, Poe, “disillusioned in spirit,” becomes a wanderer. Things get even worse after Poe is dismissed from West Point for “deliberately missing classes and parades.” Destitute, he remembers an Aunt Marya in Baltimore. She turns out to be penniless, but takes him in anyway. His kindly, beautiful cousin Virginia is immediately and constantly mooning over and making eyes at Poe, though he scares her when he says he’s haunted by ghosts and dreams. He gets two offers to edit magazines, and chooses *The Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond because succeeding there will mean rubbing it in his father’s face. No sooner has Poe married his cousin than she’s glowingly announcing herself as “The wife of Edgar Allan Poe, author and editor” as though he were the King of Spain. As editor he increases circulation by 3,000 copies and fights for copyright laws to protect writers, and stands up to his boss to make a speech in favor of the issue. Marya, Virginia and her beloved Eddie move into a fine Southern house where they can eat chicken on Sundays.

At a ball, Elmira’s husband bursts onto a terrace and insults Poe, who decks him in return. Poe vanishes for three days and Virginia valiantly drags him home from the saloon because “He’s the greatest husband a woman ever had.” They move again, this time to Philadelphia, where Poe edits *Graham’s Magazine*. Now



possessing his familiar moustache and slicked-back hair, Poe is visited by an English celebrity, Charles Dickens, a mild man with blonde hair. Though a more famous and much richer author, Dickens is linked to Poe by a zeal for copyright law, which would protect authors from piracy. And yet, Dickens immediately thanks Poe for writing an unauthorized finish to *Barnaby Rudge*, which is extremely ironic because the copyright laws these two men strongly believe in would have prevented Poe from doing such a thing! In actuality Poe wrote no unauthorized finale but merely predicted, correctly, that the slow-witted Barnaby of the title would prove to be the killer’s son. Dickens loses his mildness when Mr. Graham walks in and he feels moved to chastise the editor, “You have scruples about stealing my watch, and yet you have no scruples about stealing my work.” The resulting three-way argument rekindles Poe’s angry zeal for copyright law and gets him fired even as Dickens strolls off to continue his life of fame and comfort. In reality, the two authors did meet, but the meeting took place at Dickens’ hotel, and Poe’s primary concern was not copyright law but syndicating his works in England. Poe was hopeful when Dickens promised to find English publishers for Poe’s work, but when this came to nothing Poe’s fondness for the English author soon diminished, even more so when Dickens anonymously published a review dismissing American poetry and describing Poe as merely the best Tennyson imitator around.

Virginia continues to support her man: “You’re the most brilliant man in the country. Mr. Dickens said so...Just being with you is heaven.” She tells him he’ll be understood in New York, so they go there – but no editor will hire him because of his copyright campaign. Virginia becomes ill, though she looks as healthy as ever. Poe begs his pipe-smoking editor for \$25 to save her, but the editor won’t do it until he’s sure “The Raven” will be a hit with the average man. So Poe reads to the magazine printers. But they don’t understand it. One scoffs, “A raven? Sitting over a bust of a Grecian goddess.” Apparently a talking raven is no problem, but a raven that’s sitting on a bust is just too fantastical. Only a little blonde boy loves the poem but that’s not enough for the editor. The point of this scene seems to be that the ordinary man is far too dumb to even bother with. Fortunately, the printers do turn out to have good hearts in spite of their lack of sophistication, and pitch in

money when they learn of Virginia's condition. It's still not enough. Poe assures Virginia (and therefore the audience), that it's his legal wife he loves, and not Elmira. As she dies Virginia is serenaded with the words, "You were the rhyming in my words. The singing in my songs." There was little question that Virginia would be portrayed as a saintly angel, as she is portrayed by Darnell, a bigger star than Shepperd or Virginia Gilmore, and soon to be renowned as the Virgin Mary in *The Song of Bernadette*.

Poe returns to Baltimore and the Pearl Street Tavern, and sinks "lower and lower" into despair and drunkenness. In his dying words he continues to heap praise upon Virginia, then starts reciting "A Dream Within a Dream." The narrator tries to put a positive spin on all this misery, showing us a bust that looks more like Shakespeare than Poe while breathlessly informing us that this item is on display in the Hall of Fame, wherever and whatever that is. The only such place with which I am familiar is the Baseball Hall of Fame, and I am pretty sure Poe is nowhere to be seen there. Furthermore, we are told that Poe is laughing somewhere, which is doubtful. Even in life, Poe, though considered very entertaining by his bar buddies, was by his own admission not one given to wild laughter. "I am not of the merry mood," he declared, with rare understatement.

Poe's years of military training at West Point, which followed his time at the University of Virginia, were portrayed in "Cadet Poe," an episode of the series *The Hallmark Hall of Fame*, a show from a company which made its fortune with greeting cards, which is fitting enough. If Poe had lived to see the advent of greeting cards he would have no doubt turned to writing a few at some point, given his continual desperate need for paying jobs. *Hallmark Hall of Fame* was known for its classy productions of such works as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, so this production may have been less melodramatic and more believable than the previous big screen biography, but it is not possible to judge at this time. Recordings of various episodes of the show are available at The Paley Museum in California, but "Cadet Poe" is not among them. It is possible that a kinescope exists somewhere, and then we will eventually be able to judge. At least the words of *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* came true. The author found his way into a hall of fame of some sort.

John Carlsle played Poe in the episode, which centered on a fairly brief period of the author's life, during which fortune abruptly swung from favorable to disastrous, a pattern which was to become standard in the author's life. At first the author found military school to be favorable, and did well in his schooling. But, as relations with his petty, spiteful stepfather became more and more strained, the budding author took revenge by neglecting his duties, eventually racking up 106 counts of misconduct and being tossed out of the academy.

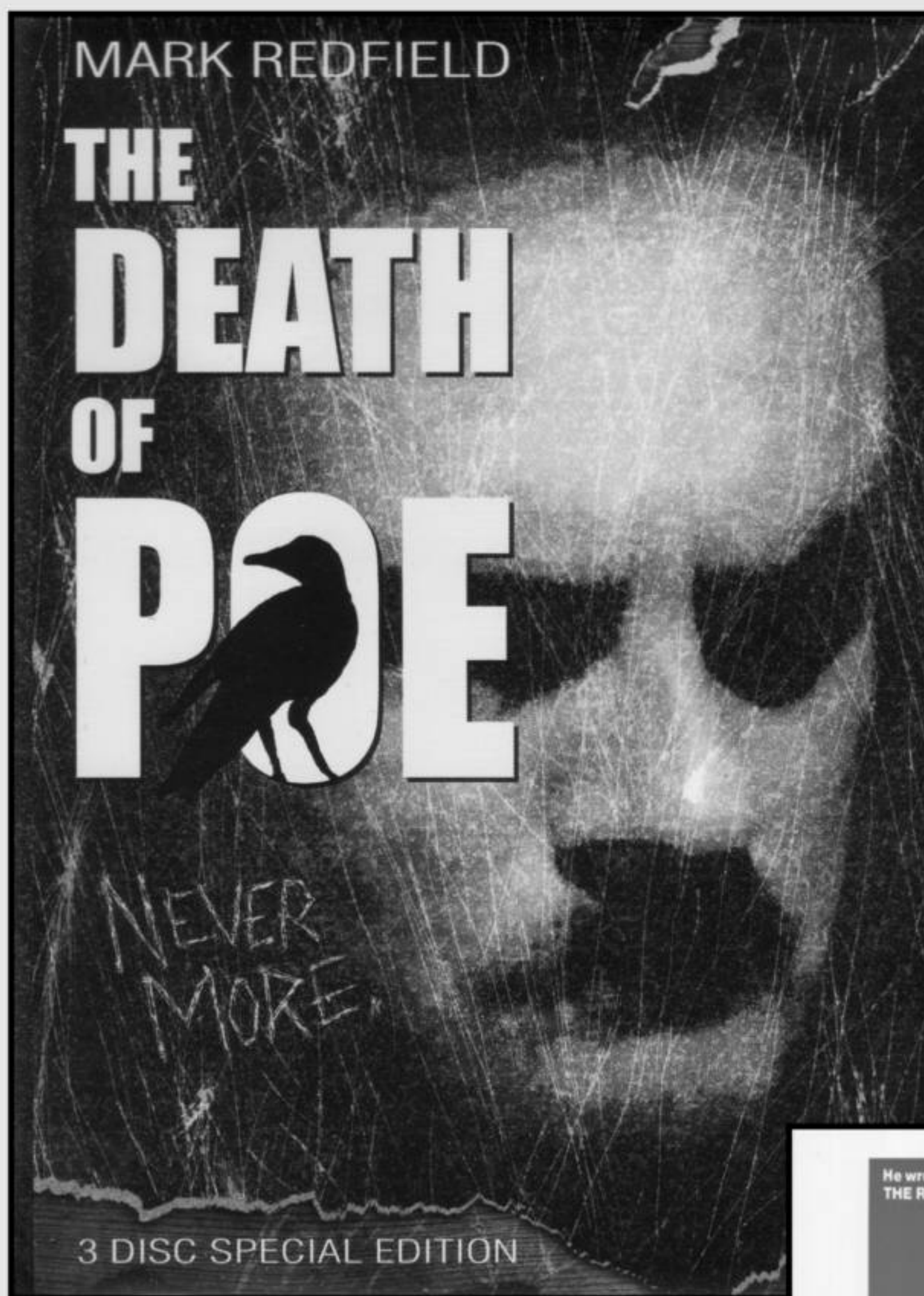
Action star Sylvester Stallone was keen to show his dramatic range in the eighties by starring as Poe. He went so far as to send his proposed script to esteemed director Stanley Kubrick, who, undoubtedly with more diplomacy than sincerity, pronounced the script "excellent," but politely declined the offer to direct. It is hard to imagine a worse case of miscasting than that of

the hulking Stallone as the thin author with a sneering intellect. True, Poe was in his youth a boxer and a runner, and he once proved his athletic prowess by swimming six miles up the James River of Richmond, VA against the current. Certainly, he is the only poet to have a football team, the Baltimore Ravens, named after his work. But he was never as musclebound nor monosyllabic as the Italian Stallion, being instead described by classmate Andrew Johnston as "slight" and "sinewy." Steroids were less readily available in Poe's day, of course.

Had Stallone's film been made it would have been the most hilarious portrayal of an author ever put to film – more hilarious and wrongheaded than even Kiefer Sutherland as William Burroughs in the little-known *Beat*. Which brings us to another unlikely Poe that never was, for none other than Burroughs himself, the bohemian legend of a later era, allegedly came close to reincarnating the author in the rock and roll age. Folk singer turned introspective rocker Bob Dylan was always anxious to establish a link between himself and the Beat authors of the fifties, and so when he set forth on a much anticipated tour, the Rolling Thunder Revue, made sure to invite Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, especially since he was making a film of the tour to be called *Renaldo and Clara*. *Tarantula*, Dylan's book of pseudo-Beat poetry-prose, had been badly received, but Dylan apparently hoped to get Burroughs to appear in a scene in which he and the author would demonstrate the so-called cut-up technique of writing. Such a demonstration/collaboration might bolster Dylan's literary credibility, perhaps. And since the film, aside from its concert footage, revolved around the theme of role playing, with Dylan and his soon to be estranged wife Sara pretending to be the title characters Renaldo and Clara, it seemed appropriate that Burroughs should pretend to be Poe. The cadaver-like Burroughs, with his Midwestern accent radiating snobbish sarcasm, would scarcely seem any more fitting than Sylvester Stallone. But then, the movie, with such characters as The Masked Burrito, was hardly high drama. Burroughs had some experience in literary play acting: in his youth he entertained friends like Ginsberg and Lucien Carr by dressing in drag and assuming a Gertrude Stein-inspired lesbian persona. Even so, it's doubtful the idea came from Burroughs, especially as it never transpired.

The most recent Poe biography to date is 2006's *The Death of Poe*, a very low budget entry written, produced, designed, and directed by Mark Redfield, who, no surprise, also stars as Poe. Poe's death inspires voiceovers (including one of Poe's supposedly elderly mother by an actress who sounds about thirty) giving disparate points of view: "He had few or no friends." "Literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars." "The Poe name will forever be blackened with insanity and debauchery." This prologue closes on a horror movie shock effect as Poe's eyes open in the coffin and the author screams and claws at his coffin, the kind of tasteless but expected scene commonplace in a Poe-inspired horror movie but completely gratuitous in a straightforward biography like this one.

Flash back to 1849 in Richmond. Poe has made



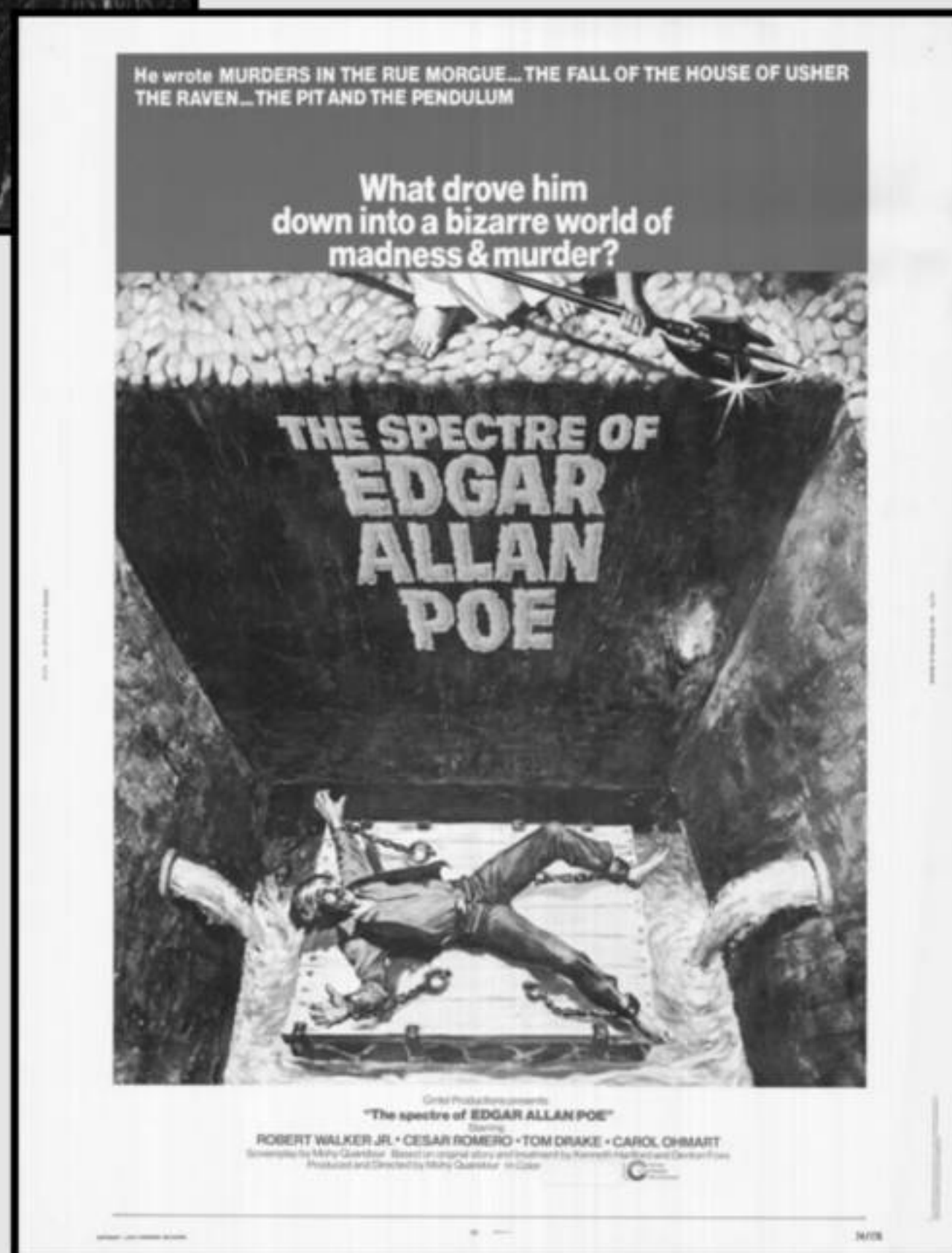
a vow to his dead wife never to drink again. With Virginia gone he has no desire to live. Instead he spends his time pitching an idea for a literary magazine. A rich would-be patron gets Poe to recite "The Raven" to impress his brother but it doesn't work. Another potential donor, an Irishman, scoffs at literature, saying that Poe should instead devote his time and money to thwarting the "so-called free blacks" who are taking jobs from the Irish. (Depicting a boorish character as a racist neatly glosses over the fact that Poe himself was no abolitionist, but in fact an apologist for slavery and the South in general.) Then an old man forces the author to listen to his daughter's terrible poetry. Despondent over his failure to launch the journal, Poe is easily talked into a drunken toast by two old friends from the Class of '29. Poe is knocked out and taken for an evening of impressionistic ballot stuffing. The author is pulled from the gutter and taken to Doctor Moran (Kevin G. Shinnick, publisher of *Scarlet: The Film Magazine*), who doesn't want to go down as the man who killed Poe, but it doesn't matter. Poe dies from inflammation of the brain exacerbated by excessive nerves.

Most of the amateur cast is okay, but the pudgy-

faced Redfield is the weakest in the lead role. Redfield relies on the same look of comical disbelief throughout, and his voice is hardly dramatic enough to carry the weight of his role. The film is actually better when Poe is offscreen. Much of the film relies on ho-hum hallucinations as the besotted Poe is pursued by spirits, including his own (a nod to "William Wilson"), as well as masks and dolls. The hallucinations are in color, while the rest of the film is black and white. The narration is sometimes nearly inaudible. Production values are low and there's not much to the story.

Recently, rumors abound of a new Poe biography featuring Johnny Depp, who is no stranger to playing strange characters, or strange authors for that matter. So far these rumors have come to naught. If the film is ever made it will be the first straight Hollywood biography of the author since *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe*. If this movie is made Depp will be roughly a decade older than Poe was at the time of his death.

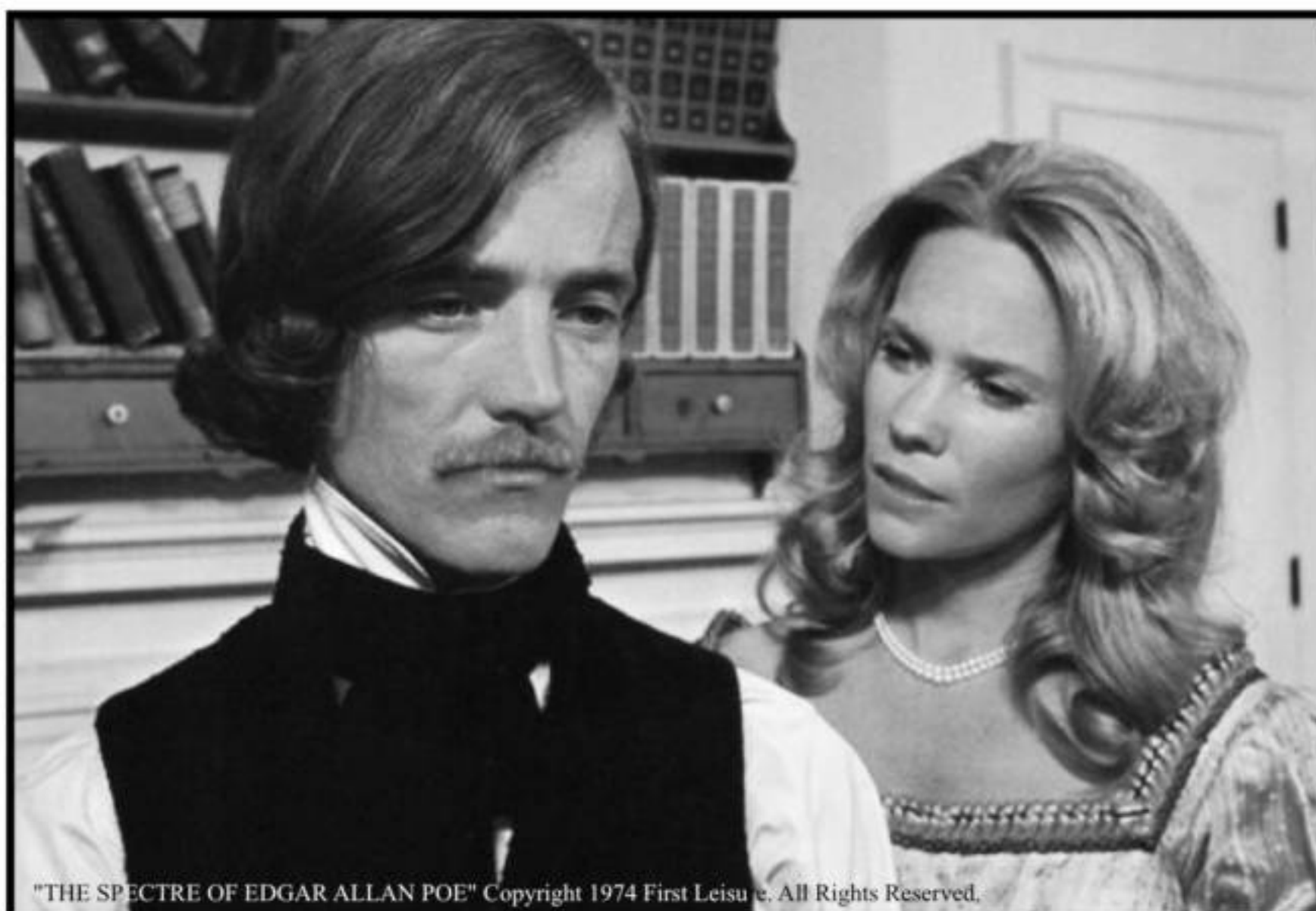
Casting history to the wayside, most Poe movies dispense with any notion of history and simply use the writer as a symbol of the macabre. *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1971) leads us to believe it will explore the romantic side of the author's life, beginning with a shot of the words EDGAR LOVES LENORE on a tree. Actually, it's going to show us the clichéd melodramatic



side of his life, before descending into creaky horror hokum. A man on a bench, who looks more like Poe than the man who will actually play Poe, speaks to us directly in a southern accent: "To some people, Edgar Allan Poe was a profound man of letters. To others, he was the incarnation of evil itself." He says the "greatest mystery" of Poe's life is the story of lost Lenore. The film purports to explain a mystery that isn't really a mystery at all, the identity of Lenore. The name, made famous by two poems, "Lenore" and "The Raven," was probably chosen for two reasons: It rhymes with "Nevermore," and it recalls William Henry Leonard, Poe's late brother. In this movie, however, there definitely is a Lenore. Played by Mary Grover, Lenore is shown running in slow motion, smiling and bouncing her hair. It looks a lot like a shampoo commercial. At the Virginia *Messenger* Poe, skinny and young with shaggy hippieish hair, is a "ruthless" critic, often "insulting." The actor playing the part, Robert Walker, Jr., lacks the imposing voice we expect.

A romantic interlude with Lenore (more running) is interrupted when she screams and dies for some reason. A pop song, "Without Lenore," plays. At the funeral the preacher looks like a hippie as well, another dated touch. Lenore's eyes open. She's not really dead after all, only cataleptic.

Adam, the speaker in the opening, is a friend of both Poe and Doctor Granaldi (Cesar Romero), who has the only sanitarium where patients are given a creative outlet. The doctor says all his patients are harmless, then, with some hesitation, admits to having one violent patient. Poe wants to study this violent man for a story, but Granaldi only agrees reluctantly. The man swears he's not insane but was only declared so in order that Dr. G. could get his money. Adam recognizes the man. "Pay no attention to what he says," Granaldi says, of course. It's pretty obvious something fishy's going on. Maybe it's the shots of the doctor mixing bubbling liquids in a candlelit room. Poe wakes up chained to a table in a room filling up with water and snakes. The doctor swears it was all just a hallucination. More hoary clichés follow, with lightning flashing and a torture room with a skeleton, a suit of armor, a hanged person, and an iron maiden. A shot of bats flying out of a cabinet is so brief and



"THE SPECTRE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE" Copyright 1974 First Leisure. All Rights Reserved.

confusing it seems like a joke rather than a scare. Poe is again trapped in rising water with snakes, though he's not chained this time. The story climaxes with a muddled implication that Lenore is killed by a patient named Lisa (Carol Ohmart), after which Poe reacts by marrying his eighteen year-old cousin and becoming obsessed with morbid things, although Adam already credited his friend with "a genius at macabre" (sic) earlier.

The song plays again: "Without Lenore/Life doesn't mean a thing/Lord, if you bring back my Lenore, I'll never ask for more." Poe's rhyming may not have suited the elevated standards of Emerson and Dickens, but it was never this bad.

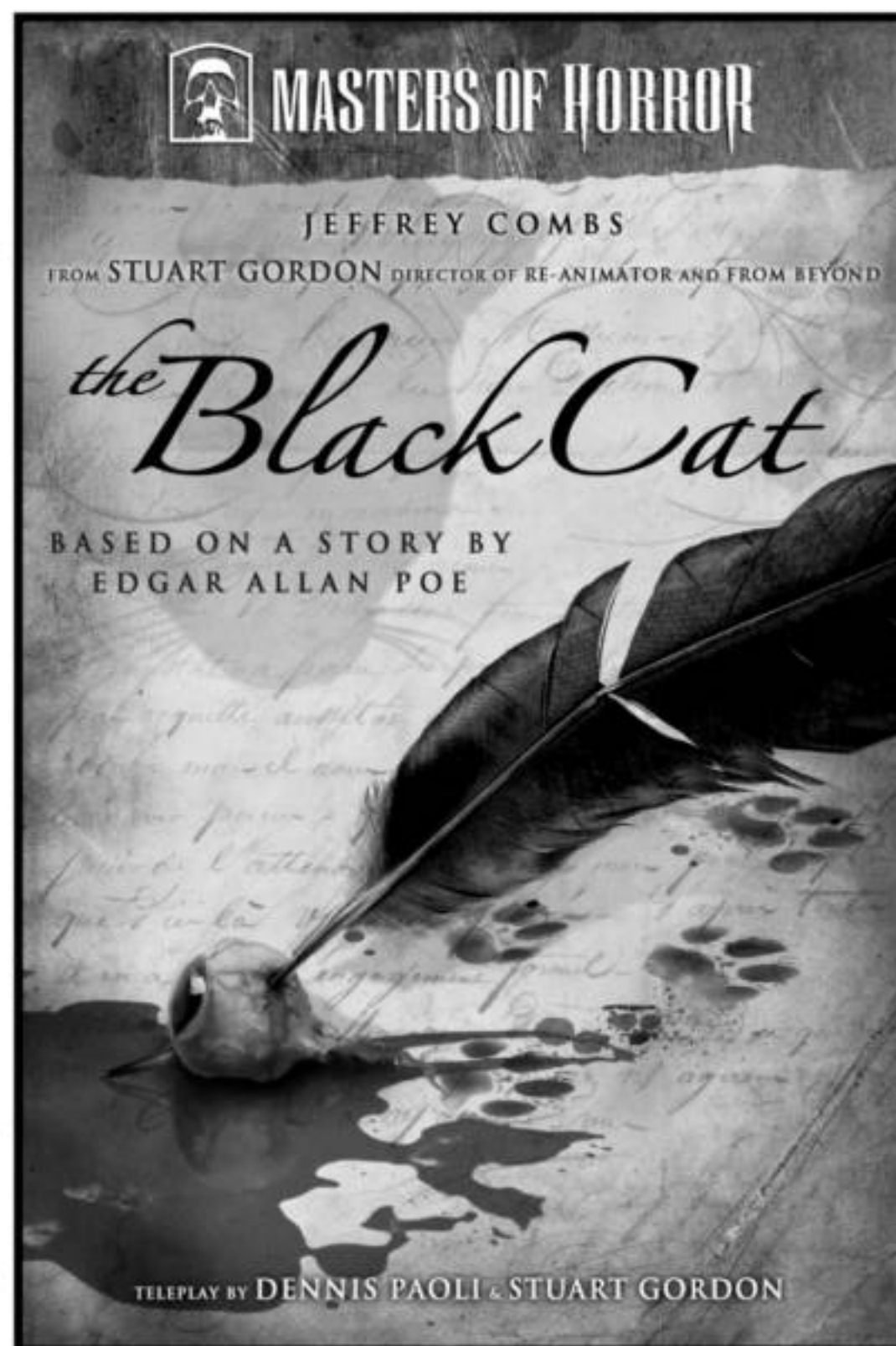
A clear illustration of how Poe's image has fused with his creations can be seen in "The Black Cat", an episode of the Showtime series *Masters of Horror* that aired in early 2007. The episode,



"THE SPECTRE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE" Copyright 1974 First Leisure. All Rights Reserved.

which portrays the nightmarish fever dream that inspired the author, gives the impression that Poe's poetry was dwarfed in popularity by his "mad tales," which uncaring editors forced him to write in order to satisfy their greed. Poe even subjects himself to a mad fantasy of strangling an elderly editor, Graham (Aron Tager) in a fit of rage. In fact both were equally successful with readers. (The real Graham was several years younger than Poe and looked even younger than that.) The highlight of the show is the performance by Jeffrey Combs as the author. Though unsubtle, Combs' Poe is the funniest and the most Southern of the screen

Poe, and the one who, thanks to an excellent makeup job, physically resembles Poe the most, although pudgier in the face. Gordon's shock tactics include the tacky usage of Virginia's suffering as an excuse for shock horror effects. Tuberculosis, of course, involves a lot of blood, which most of these biographical films are rather coy about, but the sight of poor Virginia (Elyse Levesque) projectile vomiting blood onto a piano is no improvement. The story even implies that Virginia's illness was an infection brought on by a black cat, Pluto, thus inspiring Poe's tale of the same name (from which this episode gets its title, of course). The episode makes reference to some of the more obscure (today) aspects of his character, such as his boasts to mastery of cryptography and his family history of participation in the American Revolution. A cameo by Poe's fellow author and enemy Rufus Griswold (Christopher Heyerdahl) allows for a fleeting reference to Poe's notoriety for literary attacks in the form of book reviews. Of course, the show is not meant to be taken seriously, and even concludes, after the usual grim ax murdering and cat torture, on a merciful happy ending with



Virginia alive and healthy and Poe swollen with pride at the completion of his latest story. An amusing early scene of Poe's drunken pub antics is enough to make you wish Gordon and Combs had attempted a real biography of the author, rather than one more mishmash of elements from "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "Ligeia," already done to death by Roger Corman and others.

At other times, Poe is not even the main character, but merely used as supernatural window dressing. The 1935 Bela Lugosi-Boris Karloff vehicle *The Raven* has little to do with Poe's poem, but justifies its use of the title by including a ballet in which an actor playing the part reads his poem. Sadly Poe does not get up to do any fancy hot footing.

In 1964's *Danza Macabra*, an Italian film shot by director Antonio Margheriti in moody black and white, Foster,



"MASTERS OF HORROR" Copyright 2007 Starz Productions. All Rights Reserved.



a journalist for the *Times*, heads to a London inn where an intense young man with a mustache (Silvano Tranquilli) entralls men with a tale of premature burial. His eyes grow big as he tells the tale of Berenice which, supposedly, actually happened to him. It's Poe, of course. Foster has tracked Poe down because the author won't see him for an interview. "Does London disappoint you?" he asks the author. "No, life itself," comes the reply. What's he doing in London? Who knows? Poe did indeed visit England. However, he was around ten years old at the time.

Poe insists he's a journalist himself: "Every story I've ever written is true." The voices actor who dubs Poe in the English version sometimes sounds like he's imitating Vincent

THE LIVING
AND DEAD
CHANGE PLACES
IN AN ORGY
OF TERROR
IN EDGAR
ALLAN
POE'S

*Danza Macabra
aka Castle of
Blood.*

CASTLE OF BLOOD

THEY LOVE ONLY FOR BLOOD!

Starring BARBARA STEELE · GEORGE RIVIERE with MARGRETE ROBSAHL · HENRY KRUGER · MONTGOMERY GLEEN · SYLVIA SORENT · PAUL H. NEWMAN
Music Composed and Directed by RIZ ORTOLANI · Produced by FRANK BELTY and WALTER SARCH · Directed by ANTHONY DAWSON · A WOOLNER BROS. RELEASE

Price. He doesn't see how a man of Poe's intelligence could actually believe in the hereafter, to which Poe takes offense. Foster agrees that the spirit goes on but doesn't believe the dead can actually come back: "It's not the dead I'm afraid of. It's the living." A Sir Blackwood pipes in and wagers one hundred pounds sterling that Foster can't stay the night in his castle, where a honeymooning couple disappeared. Every year a new man agrees to the wager and never succeeds. Foster insists he's no coward but lacks the money, so the amount is knocked down to ten. Already thinking of a



"DANZA MACABRA" Copyright 1964 Uly:se Productions. All Rights Reserved.

story, Foster wants to call it "The Castle of Terror." Poe asks him to beg off. Foster won't, so Poe agrees to come along the coach ride and be interviewed. On the coach Poe observes that reality "is always just beyond one's reach" and that's why people are always going on adventures to the South Pole and other faraway places. "Of all the melancholy themes," Poe says, quoting his own work, "the one most universally recognized is sudden death," which is "the most poetic theme of all when coupled with the theme of beauty. Thus, the death of a young woman is undoubtedly and unavoidably the most poetic theme in the world." Most of the movie details Foster's ghostly experiences in the castle of terror, where he meets the comely and half naked Barbara Steele as a ghost. The next morn Poe gleefully announces Foster has won the bet, but his face grows grim as he realizes Foster, though standing, is dead. Sir Thomas actually picks his pocket to pay for the bet. Poe fears that if he writes this story people won't believe it, explaining why there is no such story in Poe's oeuvre. They leave Foster standing and ride off, leaving the ghosts behind. It is ironic that Poe, who brought horror stories into the modern age by emphasizing psychology over superstition, should be used in a Gothic spook show. It's as if his influence had never occurred. Even *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe*, silly as it is, makes overtures to "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether."

Nella stretta morsa del ragno (roughly *Web of the Spider*), released in America by an outfit called Green Apples Properties, is a 1971 remake of the same

German poster for
Web of the Spider.

Eine Nacht unter Gespenstern und lebenden Toten!



Anthony Franciosa
Michèle Mercier

Klaus Kinski
als Edgar Allan Poe

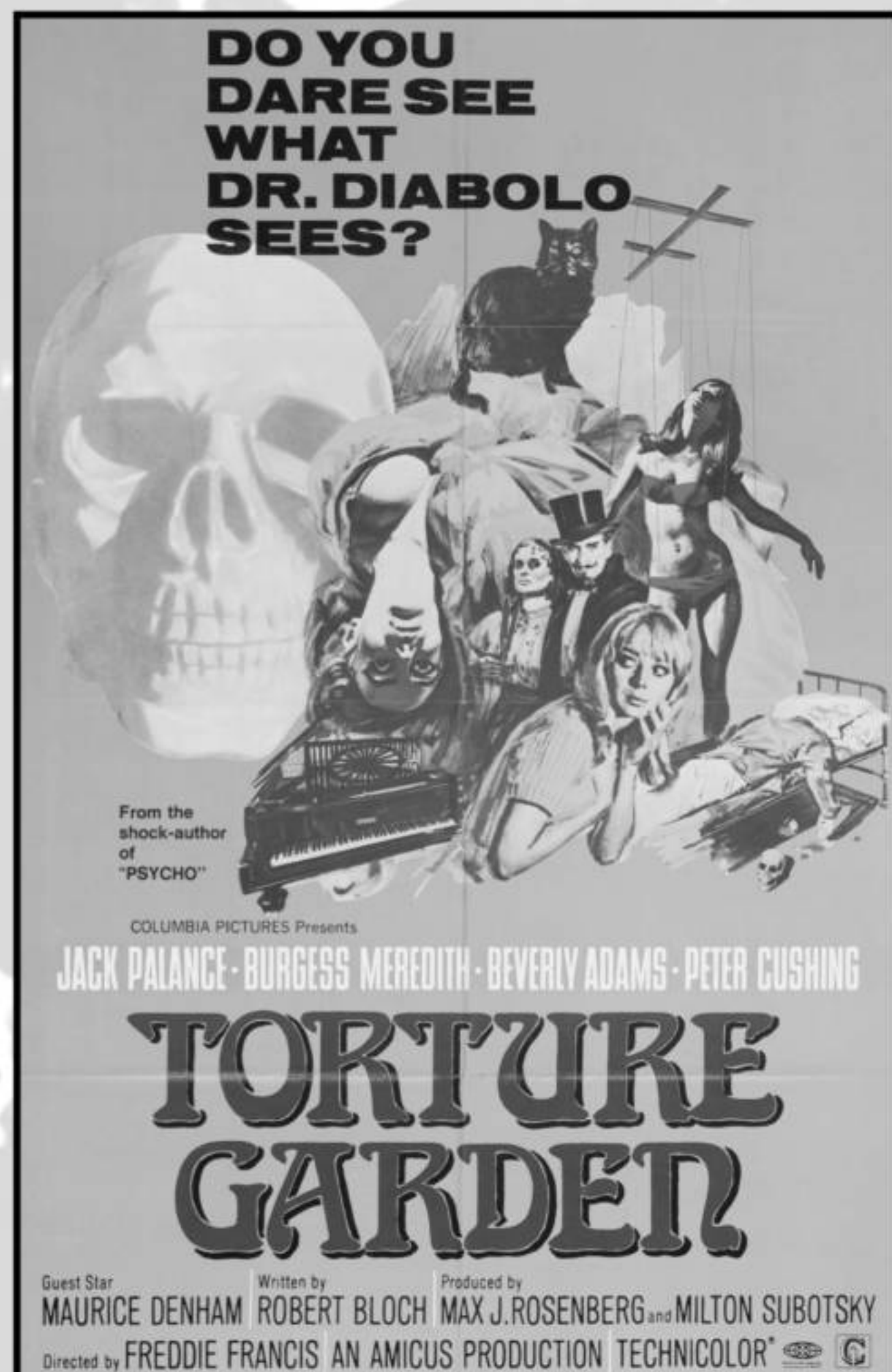
DRACULA im Schloß des Schreckens

Peter Carsten · Karin Field · Silvano Tranquilli · Raf Baldassarre · Irina Malewa · Heinz Ostermann
Regie: Anthony M. Dawson Buch und Produktion: Giovanni Addessi Musik: Riz Ortolani
Eine FARBFILM-Gesellschaftsproduktion der TERRA Filmkunst GmbH Berlin, PRODUZIONE D. C. 7, Rom, PARIS-CANNES PRODUCTIONS, Paris

Constantin-Film

story by the same director but in color and widescreen, with the added anachronistic benefit of rock guitar. Klaus Kinski, billed as Klaus Kinsky, looks more like a mad scientist than Poe, what with his long disheveled hair, craggy face, gritted teeth, and frenzied shamble. He does have a pencil-thin moustache at least. Poe leers with a torch, drinks, and madly digs up a grave. The story then proceeds much as in the original, though this time the listeners at the inn have more facial hair. Kinski's not going to remain seated though, instead lurching at people, knocking a chess set to the floor, and grimacing madly. Poe already knows the journalist in this version, and even says the reporter's been following him around like a hound. Poe hugs Foster in a manner which suggests he might kill him. This much less subtle Poe obviously has those who are worried about his mental health. This hippie-era Poe speaks of "expanded consciousness." Foster happily notes that Americans don't believe in ghosts, to which Poe shoots back, "perhaps it's because you think you're immortal." Poe has apparently been made over as a Frenchman or English or something, just as his modern philosophies and image have been shoehorned into a more traditional tale of European superstition for these two productions.

In *Torture Garden* (1967), a horror omnibus, the last story is adapted from Robert Bloch's punningly titled "The Man Who Collected Poe." Similar to Bloch's "The Skull of the Marquis de Sade," the tale describes collecting as "a kind of mania." Peter Cushing, as in *The Skull*, is the obsessed collector, who even owns the flute Poe played. He and a clearly unbalanced Jack Palance toast Poe's portrait, saying the author knew more than anybody "the secrets of the grave." Palance gets Cushing drunk so he'll show off the more interesting treasures downstairs. It seems





Cushing's grandfather was a student of occult who raised Poe from the grave and left him sitting in the basement. Thus Palance is in the seemingly lucky position of getting to meet his idol even after his idol's death. However, Poe explains he's been imprisoned in a kind of hell by the devil ever since he sold his soul and can't be freed until someone else who's sold his soul to the devil dies and takes his place. Thus he tricks Palance into dying in the flames and laughs evilly at his deed. Palance just stands smoking a pipe as flames surround him. Perhaps it was worth damnation to meet the great Poe.

Tale of a Vampire is a 1992 movie with the slow pace and cheap video look of a BBC drama. Julian Sands is a vampire who spends most of his time studying French poetry, then goes home to bite a cat or a bum on the neck. Romance blooms when he meets a library worker (Suzanna Hamilton) who's grieving a deceased lover. On one of her frequent visits to the cemetery she's approached by a gray-bearded middle-aged man (Kenneth Cranham) in a black cloak and a black hat, who finds it "exquisitely satisfying" to hang around the dead. He's a writer, naturally. He rudely shoves his nose into her personal affairs, but for some reason she agrees to go out to a restaurant with him. Who could this man be? Just as a hint, this movie might be called *Edgar Allan Poe, Vampire Hunter*. He looks nothing like Poe, and he's obsessed with vampires. Well, Poe did write a lot of the dead returning, though he didn't write straight vampire stories. He's been following Sands for some time. Not only that, but Poe's teenaged cousin is still alive as well. It seems Poe's

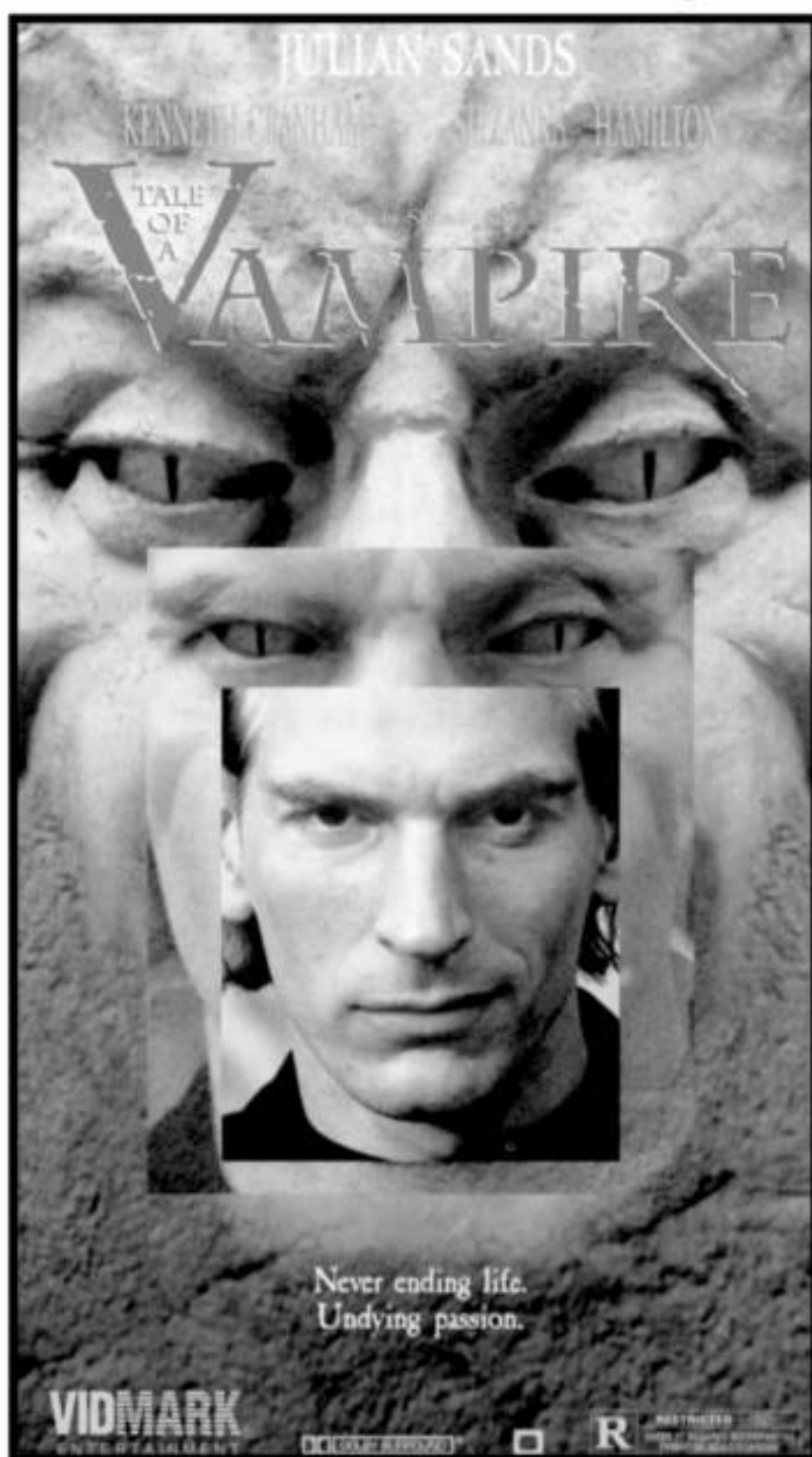
beloved Virginia Clemm was felled not by tuberculosis but by Sands and his deadly love bites. How Poe is still alive is not really clear. He doesn't seem to be a vampire, as he is killed by being shoved in the river. Hanging around from beyond the grave for another century and a half of brooding doom is just the sort of thing he would do, is it not?

As popular as the idea of an undying Poe is the theme of Poe's descendants. Now Poe had no children, and therefore no direct descendants, but that hasn't stopped this theme from cropping up in real life as well as the movies. Most of these descendants trace their lineage through Virginia Clemm, Poe's beloved and doomed cousin. One actor, who worked in the nineties in Hollywood movies like *My Girl* and the remake of *Cape Fear*, even bills himself as Edgar Allan Poe IV. This bogus semi-descendant used the Poe name to snag a coveted

appearance on "The Phantom Menace," an episode of the teen comedy show *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* in 1999. Here we learn about the author's eating habits ("Talk about the pig and the pendulum!") and get a witty twist on Poe's most famous poem, courtesy Salem, the talking black cat: "Quoth the raven, bite me!" Poe, for a change speaking with a southern accent, is disturbed by the modern convenience of the telephone. Poe disappoints two modern day women by refusing to read a horror story – he's given up that "tripe" for the inspirational market. Things get worse when zombies show up to do a Halloween dance to a Backstreet Boys song. Lord have mercy on my soul, the author might have said. This same so called Poe

IV returned to play his ancestor on TV again in 2010, on a little-known *Ghost Whisperer* knockoff called *Brooke Beckman: Haunted MD*.

Descendant (2002) begins with bedroom tableaux more reminiscent of Marquis de Sade than Poe. Roderick Usher's son, dressed in a white nightrobe, rips the heart out of Poe's beloved cousin Emily in order to get revenge. He's upset over Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," which revealed the truth about his father's incest and madness. He even tosses the heart in front of poor bereaved Poe, and if that's not enough he curses the Poe family. Years later, we find horror author Ethan Poe (Jeremy London) typing away on a computer. The story threatens to go softcore in a hurry as Ethan's lady shows up in a Bettie Page wig and does a sexy dance. But we move on to a scene of Ethan criticizing his illustrious ancestor for "ridiculous subplots," melodramatics, overdone rhetoric, and shifts in tone. On top of that, he dismisses poor old Grampa Poe as a

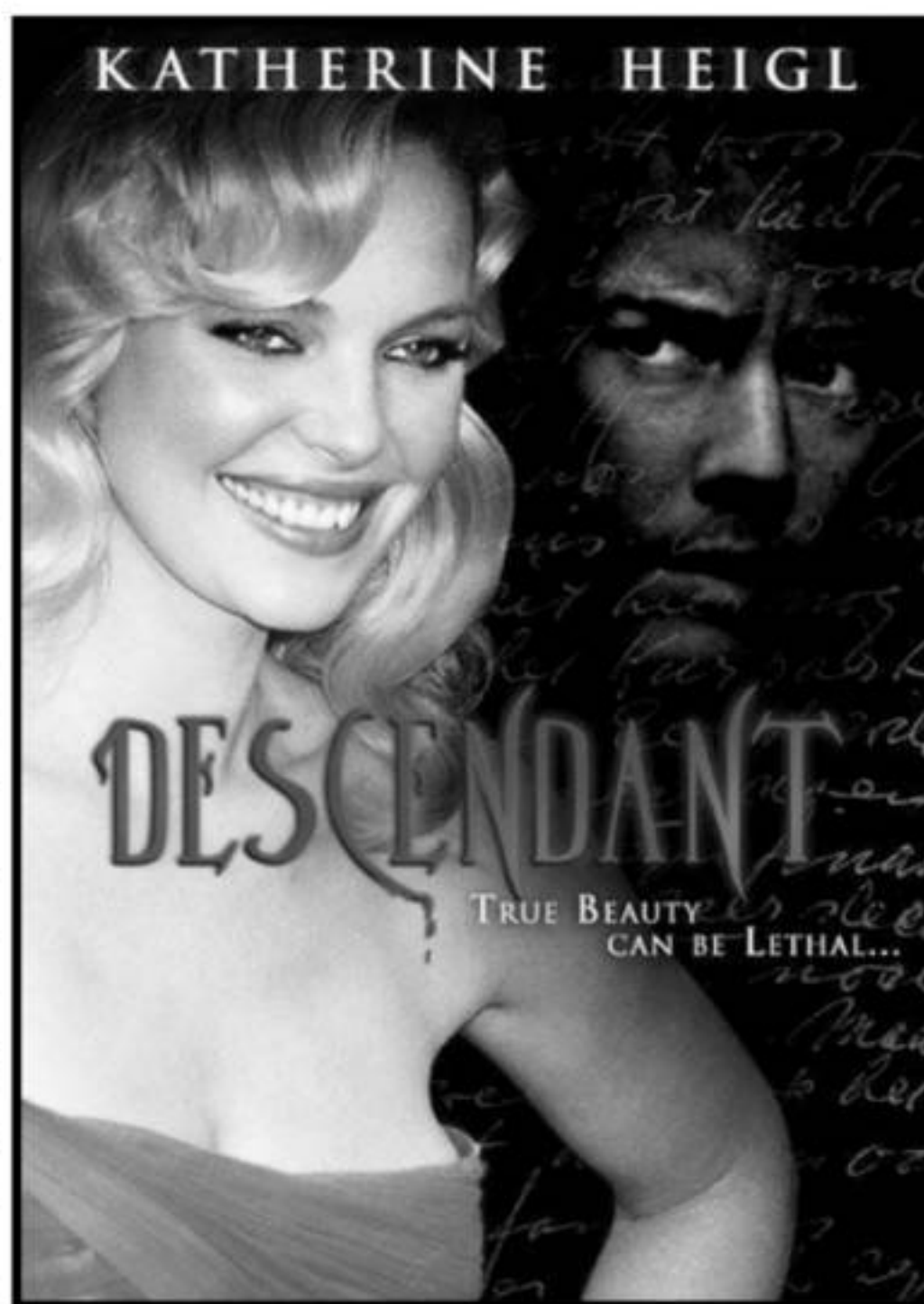


drunken tabloid writer. Of course, his negative opinions are mainly the fault of living in his ancestor's shadow for so long. Ethan is tense and kind of weird, but his sculptress cousin (Katherine Heigl, who also plays Emily) thinks he's great. She's true to him even after she sees him ranting to himself. Yes, incest goes on in the Poe line. Ethan's publisher and mother even kisses him on the lips. She also thinks it's great to sleep in the bed where her ancestress was killed by Rod Jr.

New murders begin to occur, naturally. Barfights and sex follow, along with the usual suspicious prying sheriff. Ann gets pregnant, and a familiar shadow appears, along with the usual horror movie implication that the curse goes on.

The fact that *Descendant* marked the belated return to directing, or at least co-directing from Del Tenney, maker of the laughable *Horror of Party Beach*, is not a good sign. Ethan is the usual soap opera stud type, while even poor Edgar, played by Arie Vereen, is healthier and less pale than usual. The softcore romance scenes are hardly in keeping with Poe's style, and yet his mutton-chopped ghost is seen watching over them as sultry techno music plays. He's a forlorn voyeur, of course. Throughout, references to Poe's stories are about as superficial as you'd expect: A cutaway to a raven. Ethan dreams of being buried alive. For the dreaded pendulum of the pit, a swinging mattock will have to do.

Not many people saw *Descendant*, but apparently the makers of *Poe* (2012) did. Both movies center on a modern day writer, who happens to be a descendant of the famed Edgar Allan Poe, and who is rather tense and bitter, with a hostile relationship towards a middle-aged female agent. Against the odds the shitmongers at Maverick Entertainment, who appear to have a very loose definition of the word "entertainment," have given us a digital loser that makes the pseudo-Poe effort of Del Tenney look slightly watchable and that of Ulli Lommel (more on him later) look not



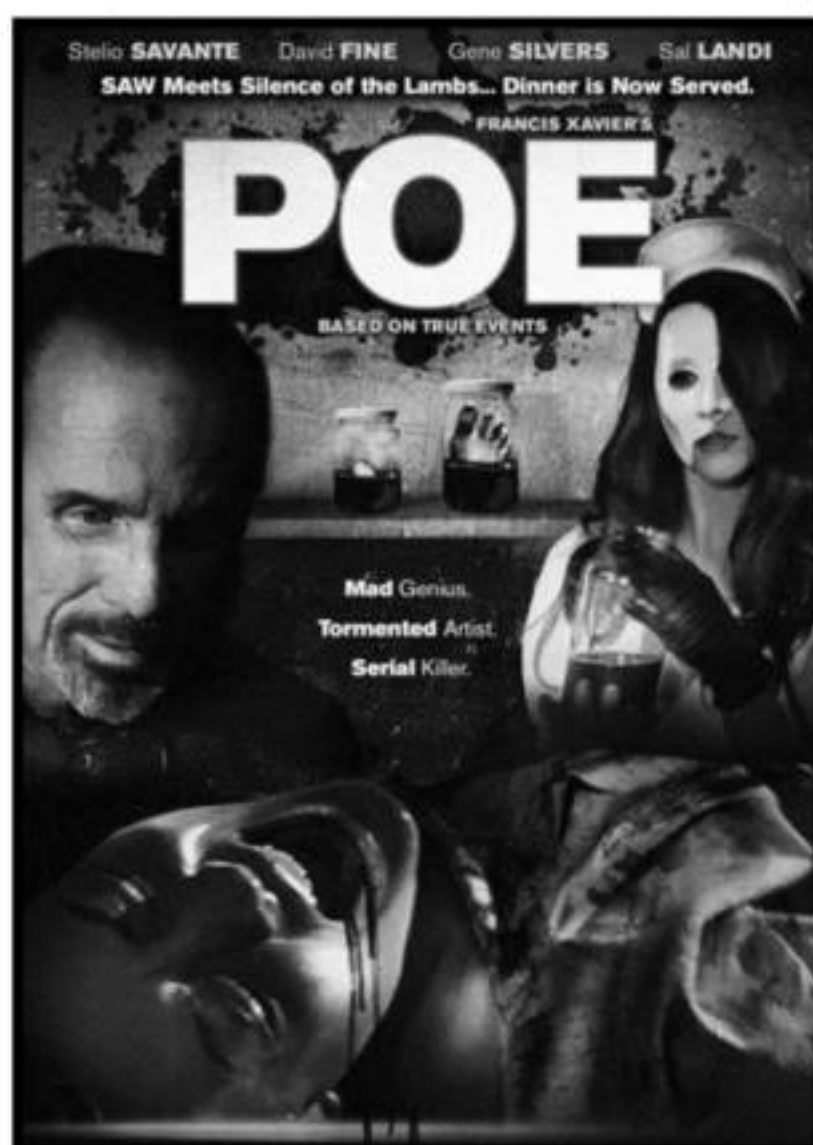
so terrible by comparison. The movie is shot at a frame rate that makes the dialogue out of synch and the whole thing look unnatural and slow. Whether this is intentional or not, who knows?

From a movie called *Poe* you might expect a biography, but no, this movie doesn't even feature the famed author's ghost, as *Descendant* and Lommel's *Raven* (see next paragraph) do. Never has a Poe connection been so tenuous and half-assed. All you get is the embittered Jonathan Poe, a writer who says things like "I don't want to compromise my artistic integrity." This Poe is ordered by his agent to spend the week with a convicted murderer who's supposedly reformed and becomes a helper to the local homeless population. The thing is, he's actually feeding the bums with the body parts of prostitutes that he

tortures and dismembers in his home. "From now on you will refer to all but food items in this house as Chef" the feeble psycho says, before ordering an unfortunate streetwalker to strip. He only preys on females because, in his words, "I cannot swallow males...I vomit if so much as a single male finger slides down my throat." True, Poe believed the death of a beautiful young woman to be the most poetic subject, but there is no poetry to be found in the degrading crap of Francis Xavier, the proud writer-photographer-producer-editor-director who takes full responsibility for this wretched *Poe*.

Nor is there poetry in *Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven*, a 2006 shot on digital video cheapie written, produced, and directed by Ulli Lommel. Framed by the chunkiest Poe yet, this *Raven* features an actor (Michael Barbour in weird makeup) who resembles Nathan Lane more than anybody. Poe's composition of "The Raven,"

done standing upright (this is not how most writers write at home, but who knows?) is intercut with footage of the bloody violence and nudity from the unpleasant murder spree of a bald modern day serial killer called Skinner. What does this bald misogynist scumbag have to do with Poe? Well, the heroine's named Lenore, you see, and she grew up listening to her



sailor Grandpa (Lommel, naturally) read Poe, which caused her to live a life as “a prisoner of poetry.” Just when Skinner shows up to kill Lenore, who’s now a singer of rock ballads, Poe’s spirit intervenes to rescue the bleached blond young lady, and the two of them stroll a California boardwalk hand in hand. So, even though it’s a tacky would-be shocker, the movie features the moody romantic Poe rather than the crazy Kinski-style version. “Hate and revenge were finally conquered by poetry,” narrates a little girl, “and the evil man suffered. He suffered in his own hell, ashamed to find out that love can conquer everything.” The touching ending is nonetheless undercut by more bloody murder, including the death of a nun. All very charming. How does Poe fit with an LA setting of swimming pools, palm trees, and Goth poseurs? Really, it’s not worth finding out.

Since Poe is credited with the popularity of the detective story in the western world, it is unsurprising that he should end up a character in mystery tales. After all, Poe’s use of first person was so effective, and his public image so indelible, that readers instinctively imagine Poe himself as the narrator of a story like “The Tell-Tale Heart,” in which the actual narrator has no name. And so the 1963 film version of this story christens the main character “Edgar.” But using Poe himself as a character was by this time an established literary device, with Poe tracking a vampire in Manly Wade Wellman’s “When it Was Moonlight” and taking up residence on Mars in Ray Bradbury’s “The Exiles,” both written in the forties, or simply serving as a pedantic mouthpiece in Walter de la Mare’s “Revenant” back in 1936.

The Man with a Cloak (1951), based on a John Dickson Carr story, “The Gentleman from Paris,” is a period gaslight thriller set in 1848. Leslie Caron, in her second Hollywood film, is a wide-eyed young lady, very wide-eyed in fact (the lighting in one bedroom scene makes her look like something out of *The Exorcist*) who

travels from Paris to New York to visit her fiancé’s grandfather, who seems to be targeted for murder by his greedy servants. Who is the mysterious alcoholic of the title? Could the raven kept by rich old Louis Calhern be a clue? The raven is named after a famed poet. No, not Poe, Villon. This mixed clue aside, since you’re reading an article about Poe, you already know the answer. The filmmakers didn’t work too hard to conceal his identity, as they have the mystery man quoting “The Raven” early on. (Later, they have him quote the bird’s namesake as well.) Nor do the DVD makers at Warner Archive mind giving the game away, as the synopsis on the back of the DVD promises “a cask of amontillado if you can guess who is *The Man with a Cloak*.”

Joseph Cotten gave some entertaining performances in his day, but his Poe is unremarkably straightforward, just as is the film’s mystery plot. This is a businesslike Poe who drinks around four bottles of wine a day without appearing tipsy, who spends all day in the tavern but has no problem solving a murder mystery if one should arise. Cotton’s manner is slightly gruff and perhaps a little cynical, but he never has the doom-haunted quality we associate with Poe, leading us to wonder why he is hiding his identity in the first place. The film simply tells us that “a man often



yearns...to wander alone and nameless.” Nor are his observations as memorable or dramatic as one would hope. “It all comes out in the wash, as they say” is one sage remark. As the Irish bartender who puts up with Poe’s endlessly drinking and bill-dodging, Jim Backus looks about as much like Poe as Cotton does. The movie provides Barbara Stanwyck the rare opportunity to sing, but this was hardly worth waiting for.

The Raven (2012), a much wilder mystery, presents us with a solution to the mysteries of Poe’s final days. It seems he was chasing a homicidal madman all over Baltimore. It is rather amazing that a killing spree that easily outdoes Jack the Ripper



"THE RAVEN" Copyright 2012 Rogue Pictures. All Rights Reserved.

in audacity and bizarreness should be somehow wiped off the history books, but that's the conceit of this movie. Poe's final illness was not the result of too much alcohol, or rabies, the usual solutions posed by biographers, but of willingly drinking a poisonous concoction supplied by a madman. The film's existence is no doubt inspired by the success of the comic book adaptation *From Hell*, about an opium-addicted mess on a similar mystery chase. And indeed, the film's conception of Poe is like something a comic-minded teenager would come up with. Poe's a brooding, mysterious guy, right? So we'll give him a goatee and a cape. The clue that leads Poe to the killer, a rain-stained note, is vaguely reminiscent of *The Man with a Cloak*. (Both films have an early opening scene of a bartender chastising the author, who can't pay for his nonstop drinking, and both films think a trailing cloak is the suitably ominous apparel for a mystery writer.)

A dastardly assassin, who has an unerring knack for narrowing escaping the clutches of the Baltimore police, patterns his murders on Poe's stories. The storyline recalls nothing that actually happened to Poe, but it does recall Argento's *Tenebrae* (1982), especially as *The Raven*'s mad villain appears a couple of times in an all-black disguise reminiscent of Italian thrillers, and also *Time After Time* (1979), in which H.G. Wells jumps in a time machine to chase after Jack the Ripper. Like the *Zodiac*, the killer holds a newspaper, the *Baltimore Patriot*, hostage by threatening to kill again if they don't run his letters. Poe invents the term "serial killer" per his editor's dubious objection in order to describe this fiend. Poe would have been pleased

to see that the most graphic fate is reserved for his hated rival critic, Rufus Griswold. During a screening I attended at a discount theatre, the fairly large audience gasped and shuddered at this *Pit and the Pendulum*-inspired sequence. Poe's creation was still disturbing the masses a century and a half after being put to paper. Of course, this murder makes a hash of the Poe biography, as the real Griswold is famous for having outlived Poe, and thus performing the most notorious act of post-death character assassination in literary history.

In order to justify the title, ravens, most of which look like nothing more than common crows, are periodically flying about, preferably in some macabre manner, whether it be devouring a pregnant kitten or emerging from the coffin of a painted lady. Whereas Poe's raven is an unbearably tenacious reminder of death, the movie's ravens are simple harbingers of it, the usual dark omens of superstition. They are first seen scavenging the corpse of a pregnant cat, thus inspiring Poe to his first sardonic observation ("The ways of God and nature, as in Providence are not our ways"). The whole ludicrous scenario, combined with the two film resume of director James McTeigue (*V for Vendetta* and *Ninja Assassin*) leads one to expect another dumb Hollywood movie. Strangely though, the movie, which plays its comic book material fairly straight while allowing Poe some pretty funny rants and rejoinders, is mostly a welcome diversion from the endless tide of noisy brainless actioners and overproduced superhero blockbusters. A little too straight, perhaps, as the movie premiered at number seven on the box office charts and proceeded to eke out a mediocre-to-pitiful fifteen million

in the United States. Skeptical viewers were heard to say they would have preferred the droll campy of that Johnny Depp and Robert Downey, Jr. brought to Jack Sparrow and Tony Stark, respectively, rather than the hoarse intensity of Cusack. Also, there is no escaping the grimness of Poe's sad death, which here is accompanied by the haunting poem "A Dream Within a Dream" (a much better poem than the overwrought "The Raven," by the way) and made even sadder by the addition of a sunny fiancée, who will presumably be scarred by her horrible experience for the remainder of her life. Given that the rest of the movie is hardly a factual biography, they might as well have let Poe live and go on to be a globe-trotting adventurer. Furthermore, the movie, like Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows* (released soon after to so-so returns), might well have done better around Halloween, rather than at the outset of the mindless summer season.

Evoking the hint of sneering defiance in Poe's familiar daguerreotype image, Cusack's interpretation emphasizes Poe the bitterly combative critic rather than Poe the macabre depressive. This Poe is forever ranting against lesser talents like Longfellow and Emerson, forever assaulting onlookers with a verbose array of insults: mouth breathers, slobs, philistines, mental oysters, fine twats, and is incapable of taking a drink without hurling the glass in the corner with a loud shatter. He prefers using his writing talent to vent his spleen in review form, but his editor wants more horror tales ("People love the gory ones.") Poe acts more like a speed freak than an alcoholic, impatient and vaguely irritable at all times.

In order that our hero might have some sympathetic qualities, doomed romance is introduced in the form of Emily, a young blonde pianist who seems far too sunny and naïve to be engaged to the morose Poe. But then Poe is clearly a stud with the ladies, as is proven by a poetry symposium at which a recitation of "The Raven" is breathlessly attended by a room of young beauties. The scene reveals a single older, heavier woman whose amateur poem "The Butterfly and The Bee" initially sets Poe to rubbing his forehead as though suffering the onset of a headache. As Poe begins to pick apart the poem, we assume the scene will be played for a

mocking laugh, an assumption verified by a shot of an amused Emily. Suddenly, Poe is struck by the woman's description of a bee as a "honeymaking thing" and overpraises the description as "terrifying, but brilliant." The scene is more enigmatic than any of the elaborately contrived murder plot. Is Poe genuinely moved by this poem, is he pretending to praise it while indulging in private mockery, or is he simply going off his rocker? The answer is left hanging as the police burst in and we're off on the next chase.

The understanding editor Maddox gives a little speech explaining for the dimmer members of the audience why Poe is the way he is ("God gave him a spark of genius and quenched it in misery"), while the author is further humanized by the ownership of Carl, a



pet raccoon(!). The author himself is given to occasional fact dropping (West Point, *Tales of Ratiocination*), assuring us that the filmmakers did indeed do a few minutes of research, but a gratuitous and seemingly unmotivated omission of history comes when Poe denies ever having written anything about a sailor, thus oddly and unnecessarily rewriting his one novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* out of existence. Poe's denial of the charge of atheism is perhaps included to lend more poignancy to his late lament "Lord have mercy on my soul."

The killer's identity is unlikely to be guessed by many viewers, but only since he is such a previously negligible figure. This is a mystery without clues, or many red herrings, and thus a cheat or at least a disappointment to much of the audience. But at least this revelation, which turns on the modern stereotype popularized by Stephen King's *Misery*, of the obsessed fan as psychopathic nutcase, avoids the usual contrived revelation, as in *From Hell*, that a likeable character is actually hiding a secret identity as a depraved monster. The confrontation between Poe and his crazed "number one fan" is likewise based on another well worn conceit, one familiar from noirish thrillers like *Manhunter*, that the killer and his prey are two sides of the same coin. *The Raven* makes use of pointed verbal sparring to an unusual degree in this day and age.

Though straight biographies have been few, Poe has probably been featured as a character more than almost any other author. The only American author who has him beat is Mark Twain. The IMDB website lists Poe as a character in forty-five films and shows, with Twain gracing a whopping sixty-six. It just happens that most of these shows and films are obscure, usually deservedly so. It is distressing to note how many of these films misspell the author's name as "Edgar Allen Poe" in the end credits. This sloppy mistake is nothing new: it goes back to Griffith's 1912 short. Since his image is in the public domain and can thereby be used by anyone, Poe is a magnet for people that need a handy signifier of the macabre, especially those who lack any special imagination of their own. Search the internet and you will find a multiplicity of obscure titles, many of them for cheap short films. *The Critic*, *The Mechanical Grave*, and God knows how many variations on "The Raven" are just a few of the titles turning up.

Poe has frequently been resurrected as a joke, as in *Gas! Or It Became Necessary to Destroy the World in Order to Save It* (1970), an apocalyptic comedy from Roger Corman that attempted to cash in on the hippie craze. The movie demonstrates how the straights of the world (represented by a cartoon caricature of John Wayne) will end up nearly destroying the world. A surrealistic touch has figures of the past coming back to life, including Billy the Kid and a motorbike-riding Poe. The appearance is something of a double in-joke, since Corman and studio AIP both made a lot of money off motorcycle movies and Poe adaptations. Poe rides up with Lenore on back of the bike. Both are dressed mostly in black, Lenore looking quite flower-childish. So it's fitting that she approves of the young idealists who are the main characters, while Poe takes a dimmer view of their potential. When Lenore inquires aloud if these kids will act just as bad as the previous generations, their raven sidekick croaks out, "Nevermore!" In spite of the obviously ridiculous nature of the role, baby-faced actor Bruce Karcher (in his only role) has the most dramatic voice of any movie Poe, uttering his ridiculously serious dialogue with the fierce clarity of Richard Burton.



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Poe was the butt of another, less fanciful joke as a bookend on the TV show *Night Gallery* in 1971, in a short bit called "Quoth the Raven," written by Jack Laird, an unfunny producer who insisted on filling time with what he thought were humorous sketches, and directed by Jack Corey, an impeccable character actor and acting teacher. Poe is played by Marty Allen, a pudgy vaudevillian with a bushy mustache who looks more like Fredrick Douglass. Beginning to write his famous words, "Once upon a midnight dreary," he is mocked by a squawking bird. The closest thing to a punchline is the author's act of throwing a porcelain cup at the raven. That's it. It's over so fast you'll think something has been cut. *Lives and Deaths of the Poets*

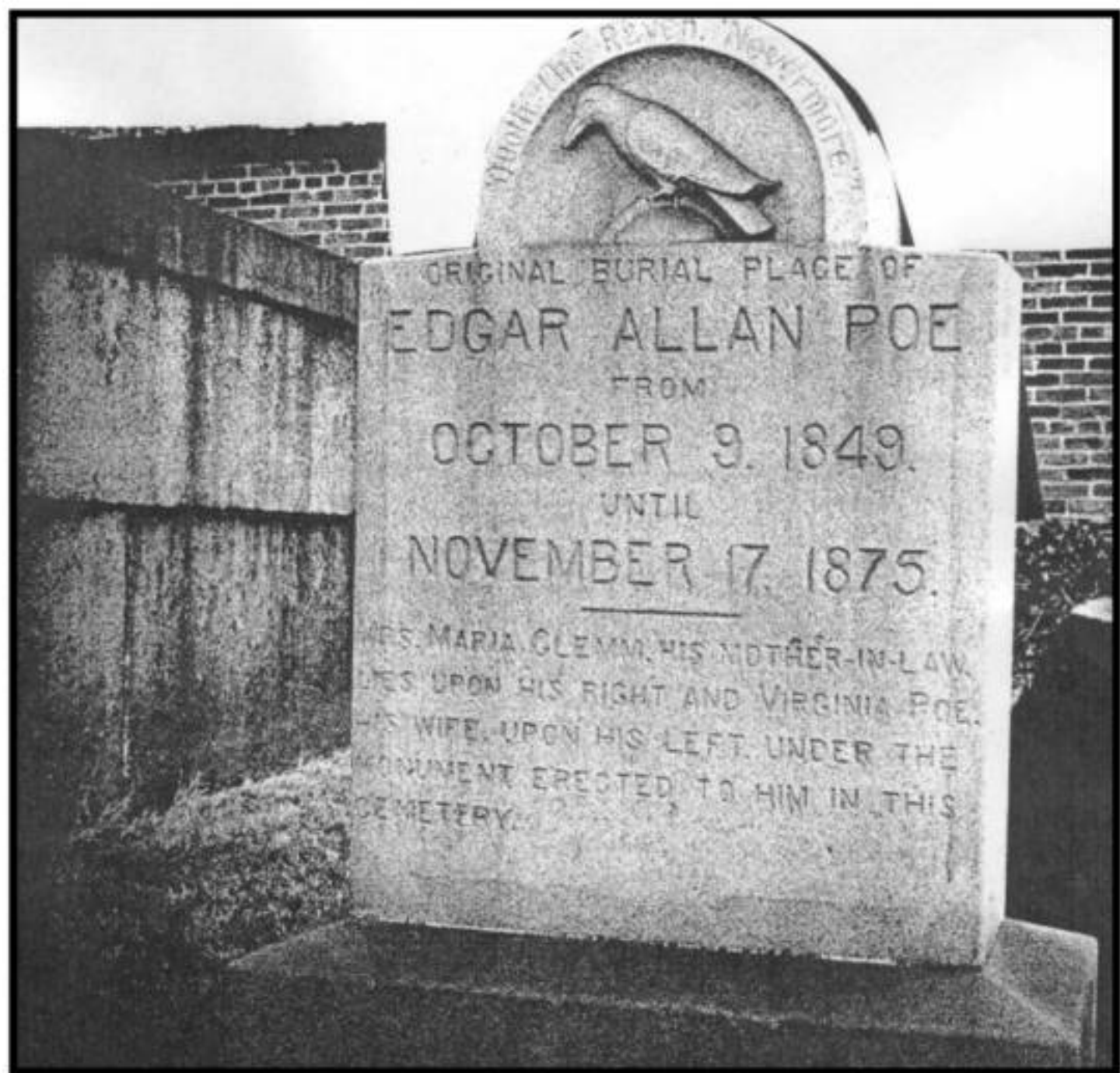


"NIGHT GALLERY" Copyright 1971 Universal TV. All Rights Reserved.

(2011) is a film of sophomoric comic vignettes about famed artists, all of them played by amateur actors who look nothing like the artists they're supposed to be portraying. Poe (Greg Coale) sings "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall." You'd think they could come up with something better than that, but at least it's not another "Nevermore" joke.

Lunatics: A Love Story, a (1991), a likeable comedy-romance that practically begs you to call it "offbeat" and "quirky," has its unhinged and lonely nerd-hero Ted Raimi tormented by various hallucinations including a Poe that mockingly recites "The Raven" from the cover of his complete works, as well as rap group Detroit's Most Wanted, an ominous syringe-wielding doctor, and even Mikhail Gorbachev, who intones "Glasnost, Comrade" from the cover of a *Time*-like magazine. Two of these hallucinations are essayed by campy cult movie actor Bruce Campbell, though the Poe actor is credited as "John Cameron," perhaps out of modesty, since Campbell already appears in a more prominent supporting role as a heel.

Poe appears in a dungeon with several other nightmare makers including Jack the Ripper, Lizzie Borden, and Atilla the Hun, in the unfunny 2001 comedy *Monkey Bone*, in which, played by the so-named Edgar Allan Poe IV, he speaks in a ridiculous quasi-English accent and calls Stephen King a "pussy" for sleeping with a night light, thus earning the rejoinder "Bite me, Poe!" On an even less distinguished note, Poe (Troy Antoine LaFave) is little but an extra in the underworld in the 1999 comedy *Go to Hell*, from the reliably low grade Troma outfit. It is one thing to see the Marquis de Sade in Hell, but exactly what Poe did to deserve his fate is left for us to decide. Too much drinking, no doubt. On the cartoon *The Venture Brothers*, Poe somehow got involved in "The Great Pyramid



Adventure" along with Caligula and Freud and wound up in a headlock. "I've always wanted to get Edgar Allan Poe in a headlock," says the blond Venture Brother. "That thing is like a pumpkin." For educational purposes, Poe turned up on a Saturday morning kids' show, *A.J.'s Time Travelers*, where he suffered the indignity of being played by neurotic comedian Richard Lewis.

Will the phantasm of this unfortunate author again rise to take his place on the screen? Undoubtedly so. Will the title *The Raven* be used for the umpteenth time? Bet on it. Filmmakers may have a shadowy image of Poe the man, but the appeal of his stories is obvious.

ROGER CORMAN'S WORLD OF POE

Between 1959 and 1964, Roger Corman produced and directed eight films based on the popular works of Edgar Allan Poe. Though far from the only films inspired by Poe's writings, these cinematic endeavors have become some of the most recognized efforts in bringing Poe's stories and poems to the silver screen.



THE HUMAN RACE

An Interview with Paul Hough, Paul McCarthy-Boyington and Eddie McGee

By Dustin LaValley

Making its way through the film festival circuit, winning awards and challenging viewers and critics expectations on formula with an original and unique story, *The Human Race* is leaving an impact on those who have witnessed its power.

Written and directed by Paul Hough, the film centers on a neighborhood that is blinded by a strong light, and woken up in a designated area where a sadistic and demented contest will transpire. Among the eighty characters of all backgrounds, ages and sexes, are Justin (Paul McCarthy-Boyington) and Eddie (Eddie McGee), two former soldiers having fought side-by-side. Eddie, who lost a leg in Afghanistan must overcome not only the physical travails but also, like Justin, the mental.

With the rules given, they start on their way. Touch the grass and you die. Get lapped twice and you die. And, there can be only *one* winner. Some try to save the humanity of the group and band together while others become temporary spree-killers. In the end, there is a large body count and as the rules imply, a sole survivor.

Paul Hough, Eddie McGee and Paul McCarthy-Boyington give an exclusive and detailed interview on their collaboration, *The Human Race*.

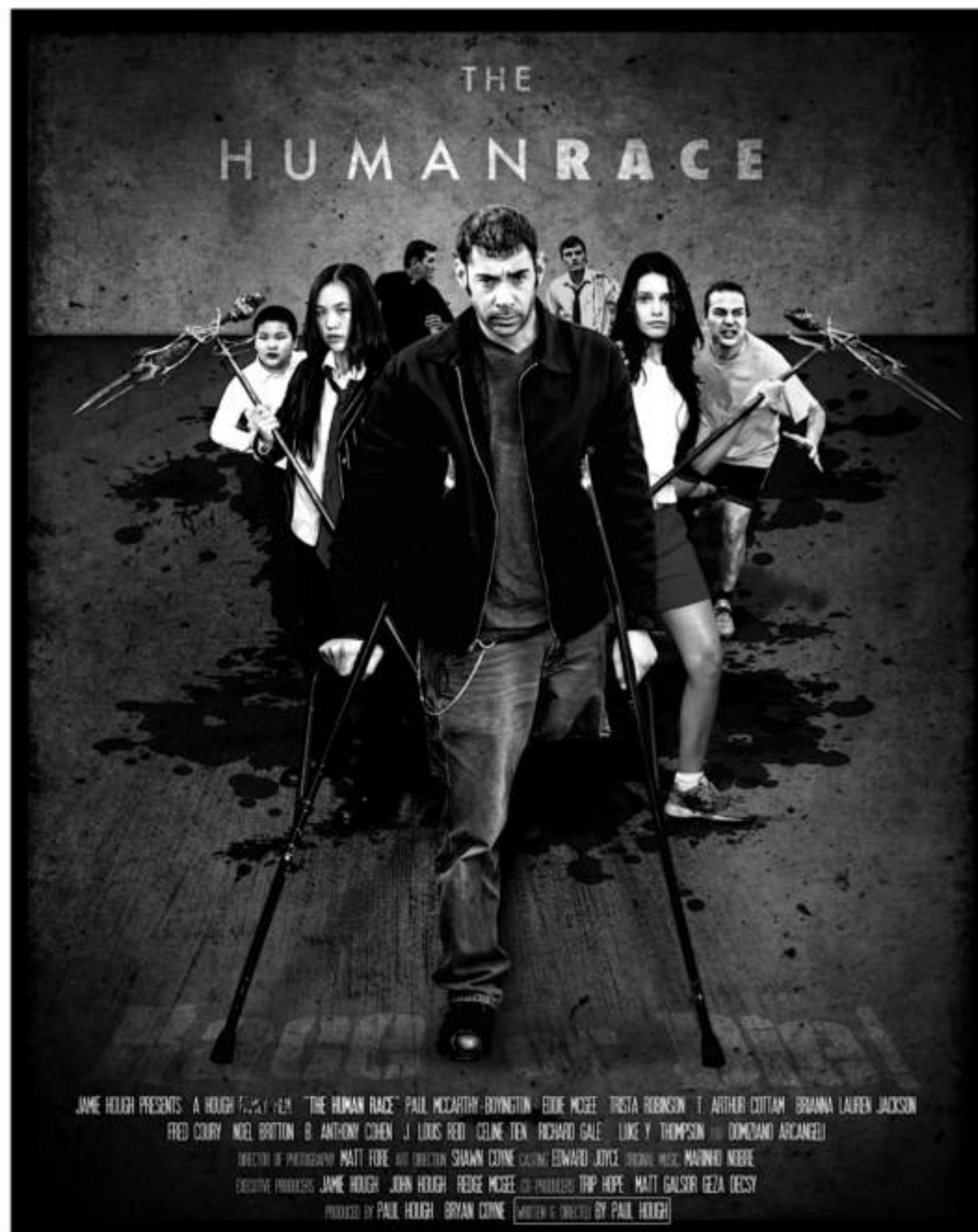
Dustin LaValley: Could you share with us the concept of *The Human Race*?

Paul Hough: In *The Human Race* a group of 80 people

are ripped out of their daily lives and all re-appear in an undisclosed location. These people are from all walks of life: young and old, athletic and disabled, white-collared and homeless. The rules to a race boom in their heads, in their own voice and language, laying out what will become a horrific race of terror: "If you are lapped twice, you die. If you step off the path, you die. Race...or die."

DL: There are several unique characters with their own stories within the film. Was this a particularly difficult aspect of the writing or directing process, the creation and focus of a large number of individuals?

PH: I wrote mainly for actors I had in mind for particular roles – so everyone's character and uniqueness was able to really shine. The hardest unexpected directing aspect was in directing the deaf characters (since I am not fluent in ASL, American Sign Language) and keeping track of their dialogue when they have a lot of lines at first was a little overwhelming. I also had to fire a few actors so you may see them at the start – and then they vanish. The good thing is that many people die in the movie, and quite a few off screen...



Eddie McGee: Paul also never gave us the whole script from the start. He only gave us our own roles up to a certain point in the movie. He never told us where and when we were going to die so when it happened it would be a shock. That is one of the great things about this movie...the unexpected is always around the corner.

PH: Yeah, the script evolved somewhat as we went along. While I knew the ending, I didn't know for sure who would be there in the end – and ultimately it wasn't the same character who wins that I had in mind when we started filming.

DL: It's been mentioned that the role of Justin was written for Paul McCarthy-Boyington.

PH: Yeah. I'd seen Paul in *Altered* and when I met him in real life I was blown away to see he was an extremely charismatic, very endearing guy – the complete opposite of the bad guy characters he is so good at playing. Instantly I felt he would be such a brilliant leading man since he can convey such a likeability but also bring such an edge with him...

Paul McCarthy-Boyington: I'm fortunate that Hough thinks outside the box and has vision. He is someone who you want on your side because he actually uses his imagination and artistic nature to see the possibilities of what another artist possesses. That's one of his attributes that make him a fantastic director.

DL: There appears to be a moral within the chaos, symbolic and metaphorical in places. Were any social critiques set in place initially or were they perhaps subconsciously dealt?

PH: I knew I wanted characters you don't expect to see in movies like this. You have kids, you have old people, disabled, friends and heroes. In the end, I knew everyone but one has to die. I wanted people you would like – and not really want to see put in the positions they're in. Several of the characters are flawed and several you won't necessarily like. Which is like real life. I think, when I write, the social critique creeps in subconsciously and if you're looking for that you'll discover more and more upon every viewing – both subtle and obvious.

DL: Paul MB and Eddie, could you tell us a bit about your characters, where they came from, who they are and their roles in the film?

PMB: My character Justin is a good dude, a leader, dependable, who has your back, someone you want on your side and go to battle with. He gives a shit, he thinks about others first, he's the first one to help and make a bad situation better. He really is a character that I look up to and strive to be in my own life. I have a far ways to go (*laughs*) but he sets my bar. Not to say he doesn't have his flaws, but he tends to lean on the side of the best of humanity, a true hero.

EM: His leg was blown off in Afghanistan and he was rescued by Justin. While Justin becomes a Vice Principal of a special needs school, I am the guy who drinks a little too much, has one night stands – and enjoys life. I'm a guy's guy. But when it comes down to it – the character has a lot of heart and will do his best to try and help everyone get out of this horrific situation.

DL: Are there things that Justin and Eddie have at stake, reasons other than their own lives to keep them from falling behind?

PMB: I think staying alive is enough at stake for wanting to not fall behind, but they also know it's about helping others in *The Human Race* to stay alive as well.

EM: I think both guys are good guys and have done the right thing their whole life and this is just another chance for them to step to the plate and be the heroes they were born to be.

DL: How did you get into the minds and bodies, the mindsets and the physical demeanors for the film?

PMB: I just tried to peel away my doing-ness, actor-ness, whatever you want to call it and just *Be*. This is the one character that I really tried to just focus on making pure and not overcomplicating it.

EM: I started working out for this film six months before we went to camera. It is a real physical role and I needed to be in good shape. Paul had us do a lot of of running. Take after take. I'd lose a few pounds a day in sweat and have to make sure I put it back on at night.

DL: Eddie, how did you come to find yourself in *The Human Race*? Were you involved with the film before casting?

EM: Yes, I was lucky to have been involved at the ground floor of this one. Paul and I are good friends and being a disabled actor it's hard for me to find good roles. But to have Hough

Justin (Paul McCarthy-Boyington) discovers that he's a participant in the ultimate death race.



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**Eddie (Eddie McGee)
discovers the remains of an
unfortunate victim.**

PMB: Yes, totally, I just thought of the good people/heroes that I've been lucky to know in my life and just tried to do my best at channeling their attributes and qualities. When I see this or experience these people it gives me good vibes and awakens my optimizing on the human-race doing great things. Because I can easily go to the dark side and think, no bueno.

DL: How was creating, being Justin, different than other characters you've

write parts for me is a true blessing as an actor. He is a true visionary who is not afraid to take filmic risks.

played? Is there an attribute to him that stands out from the others?

DL: You did all your own fights and stunts. Were you comfortable with this going in, was there specific preparation, training?

EM: Yeah, I love doing stunts. I trained in wire work and martial arts. With a movie with the word "race" in it – you know it's going to be physical – and I love that stuff. Besides – it's pretty damn hard to find a one-legged stunt double.

DL: Paul MB, your character has been called the good guy, who at times tries to keep the situation from turning deadly. Could his ethics be sort of a leveler as well, a piece of good fighting the overwhelming bad?

PMB: I would say playing the role of Justin was more of a sewing over a cooking experience. I can only speak from my own experiences but I have to say playing a role like Justin who is good person, a hero, whatever you want to call him, which has few flaws is more of a challenge than playing the guy who is flawed, bad, crazy, funny, etc. Because in doing less, letting things happen you walk the tight rope of being boring, you really have to just trust that your choices and you the being/artist, whatever fill-in-the-blank, are enough. Because it can really turn into a mind f**k of dullsville. The attribute that really sticks out is thinking of others, he cares beyond his self, his head is definitely not stuck up his own ass.



"THE HUMAN RACE" Copyright 2013 Paul Hough Entertainment. All Rights Reserved.

**Joining this marathon race
is nothing short of murder.**

DL: Paul H, you turned down some large offers to stay true to your film, to your cast.

PH: The film grew more out of necessity. I had made a short film with Eddie called *The Angel* – which won a lot of awards. As such, I tried to get several scripts made – but all of them featured a character with one leg (since Eddie is such an inspiration to me). I was essentially told that no one would finance a movie starring someone with one leg – so we set about making an indie film called *Remember My Name*. Four weeks before the start of that, one of the producers vanished – which left me with a little bit of money – but not enough to do what we were planning to do. I had a huge, epic script called *The Human Race* which I decided I could make if I scaled it down – and set it in one particular location that we somewhat had access to. I used a lot of the actors I had cast in *Remember My Name* and wrote roles especially for them.

DL: *The Human Race* has been linked to the great grindhouse films of decades past. Is this a fair assessment, would you categorize *THR* as grindhouse?

PH: If you think it's bizarre having one of the leads have one leg, then you might consider this grindhouse. I don't know if I do and never thought of it like that while I was making it. It is certainly violent and somewhat sadistic. But it also has tremendous heart.

PMB: Ditto...with Mr. Hough.

EM: I agree with Hough. It's a fun film for us and I think people will enjoy it. For me. I love that you can't judge the book by its cover in this. And that you see real quick in this film no one is safe.

DL: As there are with every release, similarities are noted. *The Human Race* has been compared to *Battle Royale* and Stephen King's *The Long Walk*, which Frank Darabont has spoken of bringing to the screen. How does *THR* differentiate itself from those mentioned?

PH: I haven't read *The Long Walk*, but I certainly drew inspiration from *Battle Royale* and *Run Lola Run*. I love *Battle Royale*. It is one of those movies that makes an impact on you. You won't watch *The Human Race* and see a run-of-the-mill movie. I think you may love it, may hate it, but it will evoke a reaction. I want to make a career out of making films that you remember...and hope that this is the start of that.

PMB: Yes it will definitely evoke a reaction.

EM: What I love about this film is that it makes you think after. I've seen people argue about morals after screenings in the lobby. And then, like, two little kids, they flag me down like their mother and ask me who was right.

DL: I have to ask about the kills. Can you give us descriptions to a few of your own personal favorites?



PH: Well, to start with, everyone but one person dies in the movie. We start with eighty, and end with one. That was very important to me, making sure we don't cop out. Some of the deaths are unpredictable and shocking, some will elicit cheers. One of the most unpleasant characters (played by Richard Gale, director of the *Horribly Slow Murderer With The Inefficient Weapon*) just stands firm and pushes people onto the grass. Stepping onto the grass results in your head exploding – and he essentially goes on a furious killing spree. There are some other deaths I'm very proud of – which have elicited some huge reactions – but to be honest I don't really want to give anything away.

PMB: There's an awesome surprising one, but unfortunately I'll have to let you know that one after the film comes out.

EM: I'm in a good fight scene in which I come out on top. I like that one. Again not wanting to give too much away.

DL: *The Human Race* has been on a festival run, gaining praise from critics. How has the reception been from the audiences?

PH: Tremendous. But for the first half of the movie there is usually an uncomfortable silence.

EM: I think people are shocked and gripped by what they're seeing.

PH: But then as the movie progresses it takes you on a journey through a lot of different emotions and the audience warms to the unpredictable nature of the race.

DL: Eddie, how did it feel to win Best Actor at the Mile High Film Festival by judges Jeffrey Reddick (writer, *Final Destination*) and Daniel Myrick (writer, *The Blair Witch Project*)?

EM: Flattered – just flattered. It was something that I'm very proud of.

DL: Is there a certain outlook that you hope viewers take away from the film?

PMB: That it was a wild, entertaining, and unpredictable ride.

Keep an eye on The Human Race and all of its 2013 screenings and appearances at its official website:
www.thehumanrace.me.

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presents the free ebook
of collected fiction...

"Extraordinary."

--Thomas Ligotti



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PHANTASM

FEAR THE SPHERE:

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT THE ENTIRE PHANTASM FILM FRANCHISE

BY VINCENT S. TOBIA

What's that?

You aren't familiar with the *Phantasm* movies? The film franchise that began in 1979 and (possibly) ended in 1998? A horror franchise consisting of four movies, all written and directed by Don Coscarelli?

What about the villainous undertaker, the Tall Man? Fan favorite ice cream vendor/evil hunter Reggie Bannister? A beautiful 1971 Plymouth Barracuda? flying killer spheres? Murdering dwarfs, that kind of resemble Jawas and may or may not be from outer space or mars or somewhere beyond the Tall Man's Gateway of cylindrical tuning forks!?

Still No?

Shame on you. Let us begin.

"BOY!!" - *The Tall Man*

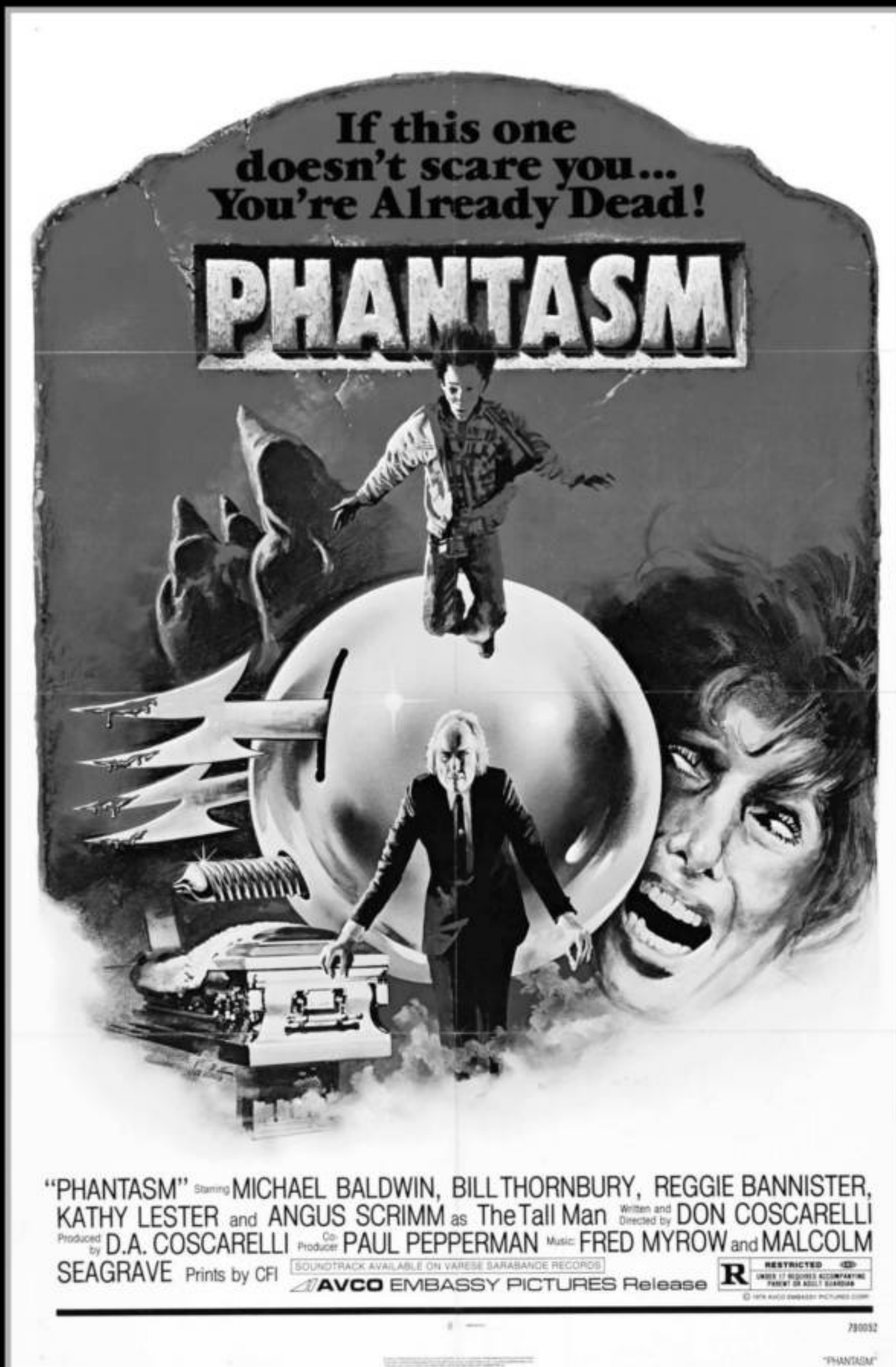
Phantasm (1979)

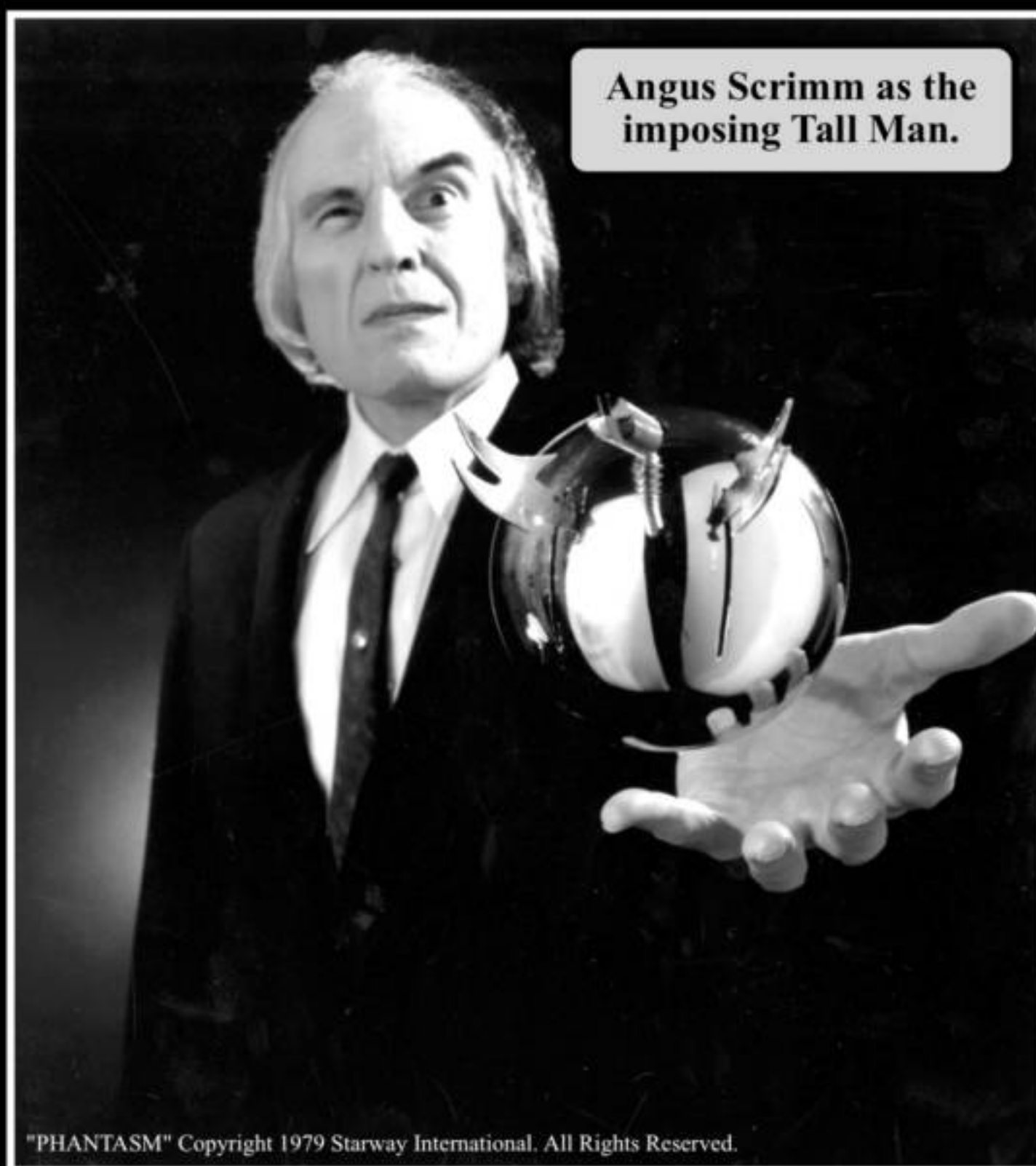
Right out of the gate, one thing becomes blindingly apparent: *Phantasm* is just plain old fun. It's a type of horror movie that grows on you; it's the sort of film that blends different genre's together. And it's a fun loving exercise in adventure/horror! I coined that phrase, by the way. This film series has a great deal of originality in both story and special effects.

Don Coscarelli made sure that if he was going to be making a horror movie, that it would be like no other. That it would include many different horror, action, and even sci-fi elements. You might know of Coscarelli's hit movie *Bubba Ho-Tep*, which starred Bruce Campbell as an elderly Elvis Presley. Coscarelli also had a new movie out this year, *John Dies at the End*, which is based off a book by the same name, written by David Wong.

Phantasm begins at night, in Morningside Cemetery. A ravishing young blonde woman (the Lady in Lavender) is making love to a young man named Tommy.

Things seem to be somewhat normal here. Except that when the deed is done, the Lady in Lavender pulls out a knife and kills Tommy. In a rather quick jump cut we see an image of the Tall Man, planting early seeds of distrust in his presence for the entire film. The Tall Man





Angus Scrimm as the imposing Tall Man.

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is an old gentleman played by none other than Angus Scrimm. Angus also plays the Tall Man in each subsequent film as well. He seems to hang over this particular installment, in charge of all of the antagonists; just like a great horror villain should! The film's quick cuts and clever editing by Coscarelli really help this movie stand out as something unique, the attention to detail in post-production adds yet another dimension to the *Phantasm* mythos.

Tommy's death brings about the reunion between Jody Pearson and Reggie Bannister, both 20-something year olds. Jody is played by Bill Thornbury throughout the series as well. And guess what? Reggie is played by the actor Reggie Bannister, also in every film. They meet up at Tommy's funeral, Jody being followed there by his 13-year old brother Michael. Jody and Michael's parents died two years prior, so before Tommy's funeral begins Jody enters the large mortuary to pay his respects to their deceased mother and father. Michael Pearson is played by A. Michael Baldwin.

The mortuary set is incredible for this movie. It's large, cold, and creepy as hell! Jody hears a few strange noises while roaming the mortuary before the Tall Man pops out and scares the crap out of him.

"The funeral is about to begin, sir!" And yes, the Tall Man does have a job, he's the mortician and undertaker for Morningside. Which is exactly where he would need to be, as you'll see later.

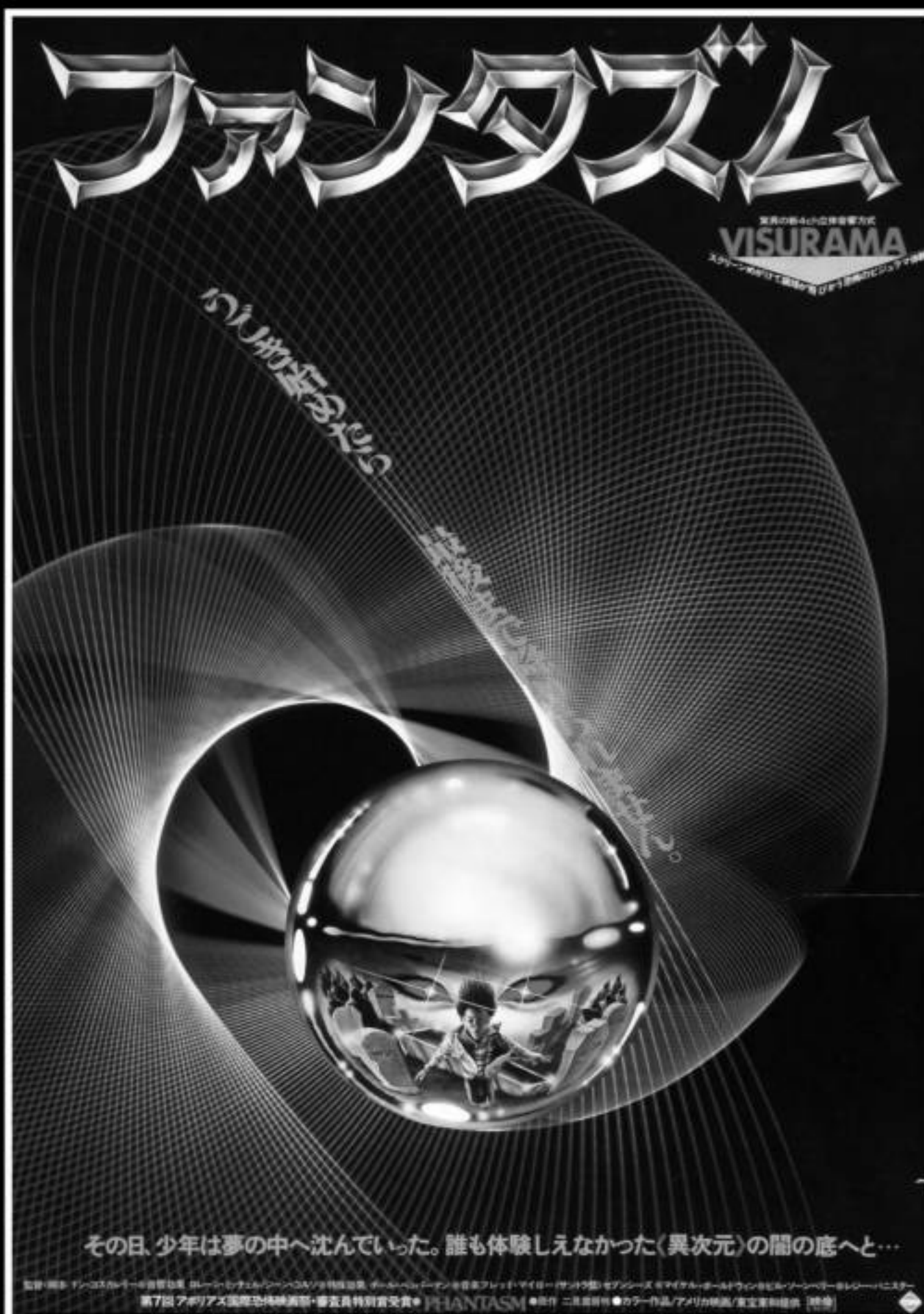
Tommy's funeral ends, Jody and Reggie leave but little Michael is still hanging around, watching through a pair of binoculars in the distance. Michael witnesses the Tall Man single-handedly pick up Tommy's coffin and nonchalantly toss it into the back of a hearse. Michael's awareness of the situation begins.

One aspect I love about this film is that Michael

seems to live every 13 year old boy's dream. He rides a dirt bike, drives a car, fixes cars, shoots firearms and, oh yeah, fights evil! But the most important part to Michael's character is that he is endlessly innovative and resourceful. He is without a doubt the most clever and forward thinking character in this film.

Michael decides to visit a fortune teller, because he is concerned about the possibility of his older brother Jody leaving him and also fearful of the Tall Man. The fortune teller gives him the simple advice of "Don't fear." And that phrase wraps around and becomes revisited in the film's finale. There is also an optical effect done in this scene, a black box appears and then disappears in front of Michael. This obviously registers as one of the many simple practical effects that *Phantasm* relies on, which I think somehow adds to the charm of the movie as well. It's practical and it's fun.

The ever curious Michael decides to sneak into Morningside Funeral Home, wanting to discover more about the insidious Tall Man – and he gets more than he bargained for. Once inside, Michael is chased down by another man who seems to be working for the Tall Man. And now enters the first flying sphere of the series! These extremely fast flying silver circles of death are no joke. Michael ducks down when the sphere attacks and the



Japanese theatrical poster for *Phantasm*.

other man gets one death sphere to the head. It stabs him in the forehead and then begins to literally drill into his skull, shooting lengthy streams of blood out from the back of it.

Michael then narrowly escapes the Tall Man, but not before cutting off one of his fingers. And on closer inspection Michael notices that the finger still moves all on its own. This is the proof Michael needs to show his older brother Jody that the Tall Man is some sort of supernatural threat.

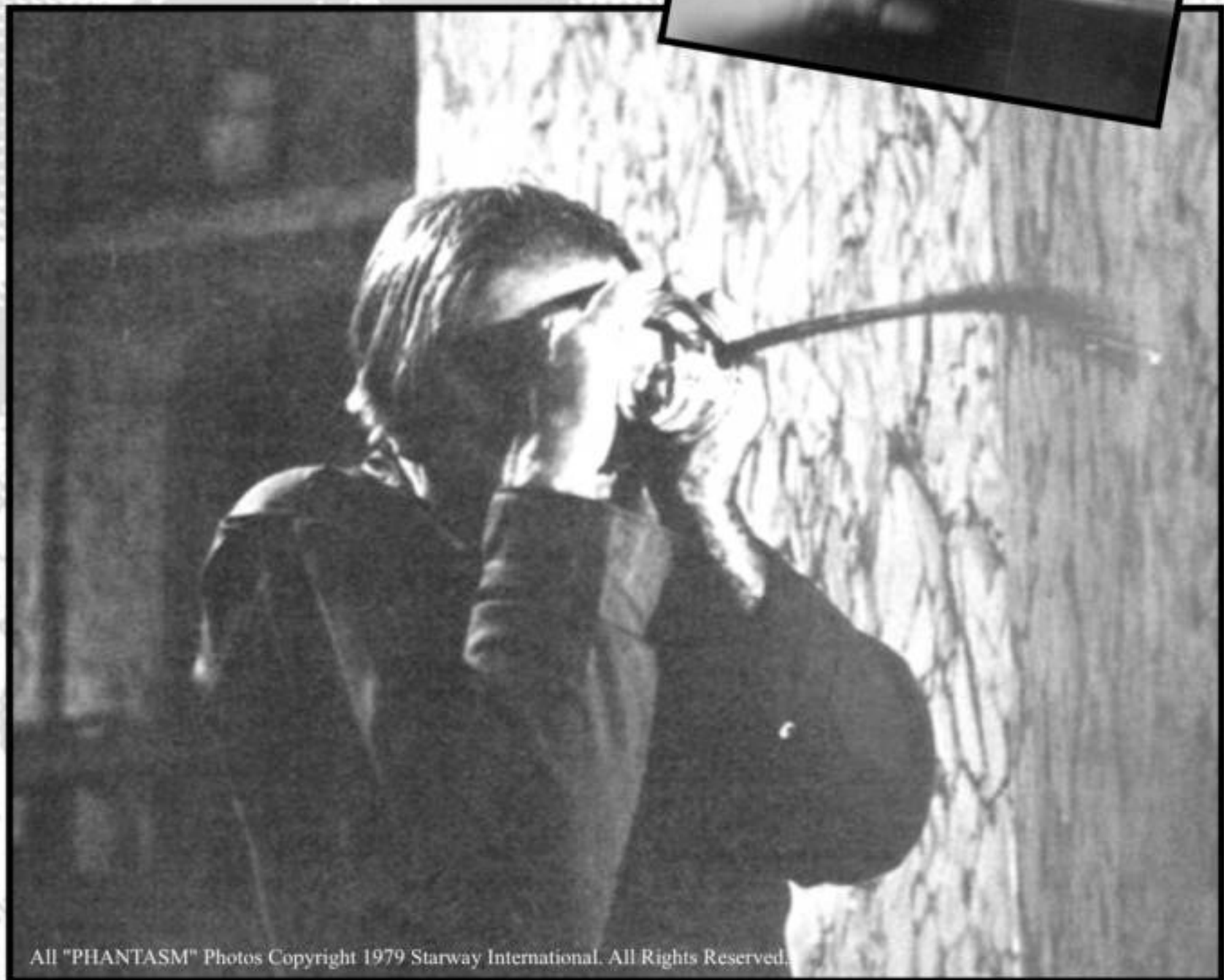
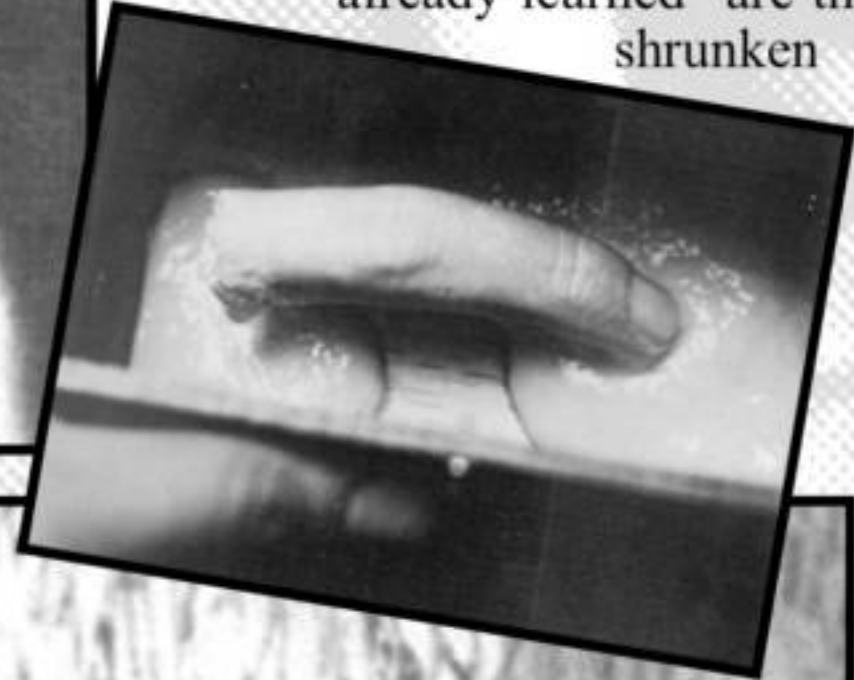
The next act of this film really takes off when Michael shows Jody the Tall Man's detached yet still animated finger. Jody realizes that his little brother had been correct and now he is on board. Jody first wants to take Michael's evidence to the sheriff but that plan falls apart when the Tall Man's finger turns into a giant black bug, which they properly dispatch into the garbage disposal.

One of *Phantasm*'s secrets is revealed during the next car chase. Michael and Jody are chased down by a large hearse. Michael is the one driving

the Barracuda, so Jody takes it upon himself to unload quite a few shotgun rounds into the hearse. That does the trick, sending the hearse out of control and crashing into an embankment. The brothers then inspect the damaged vehicle and find that one of the dwarfs was driving it – and that specific dwarf is actually the compressed body of Tommy, their friend who died at the beginning of the film.

Jody calls on the help of Reggie and then decides to lock Michael in his room. And here is a great example of Michael's ingenuity. While locked in his room, Michael discovers he has a hammer, a shotgun shell, a thumbtack, and scotch tape. He sticks the shotgun shell onto the thumbtack, then tapes the shell to the hammer. One swing against his bedroom door and BANG! Michael is this film's little MacGyver.

The final act begins when Jody, Michael, and Reggie head back to Morningside. They discover a large door that has a distinct humming noise coming from within. Inside, the room is entirely white and the walls are lined with many black barrels. No, the Tall Man isn't distilling bourbon here, each of the barrels contains a dwarf – which we already learned are the shrunk



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bodies of deceased humans. In the middle of this white room stands two chrome cylinders. Michael cautiously puts his hand in between the cylinders and he gets quickly pulled through – the cylinders are a gateway to somewhere else. While on the other side, Michael sees a red-planet where tons of the little dwarfs are marching off into the distance. But before Michael could fall any further, Jody grabs him and pulls him back through the gateway. Michael's theory is that the Tall Man is shrinking down the bodies of the dead to use as slaves on some distant planet and those chrome cylinders are the doorway to the Tall Man's home world. Not exactly standard horror/sci-fi material, which is why I love it!

The white room then goes black and all three of our heroes are separated. Reggie is left alone in the white room and he gets the brilliant idea to place his hands on top of the chrome cylinders. This causes a mini-tornado inside the belly of Morningside. Reggie makes his way outside with gale-force winds ripping everything around, he comes face-to-face with the Lady in Lavender. She quickly pulls out her dagger and stabs Reggie in the stomach, killing him.

Yes, Reggie Bannister dies in this movie.

It is then fully revealed that the Lady in Lavender is indeed just a disguise for the Tall Man. Does that mean in the very first scene of this film, the Tall Man and Tommy actually...!? Oh wait, just skip that idea.

Michael and Jody come up with an idea to trap the Tall Man in an old abandoned mine shaft. Michael does a cunningly swift job of leading the Tall Man in a game of cat and mouse and has him *literally* fall for the brothers' trick. For the icing on the cake, Jody rolls a huge boulder over the mine shaft...sealing it for good.

Michael and Jody both survive and claim victory over the Tall Man.

Right?

Nope, wrong.

In the very next scene, Michael is sitting in front of the fire place talking Reggie.

No, Reggie Bannister does *not* actually die in this movie after all.

Michael goes on to explain that he fears the Tall Man will kill him, but Reggie states that Michael was only having a very bad nightmare and that Jody was killed in a car accident.

Simple as that.

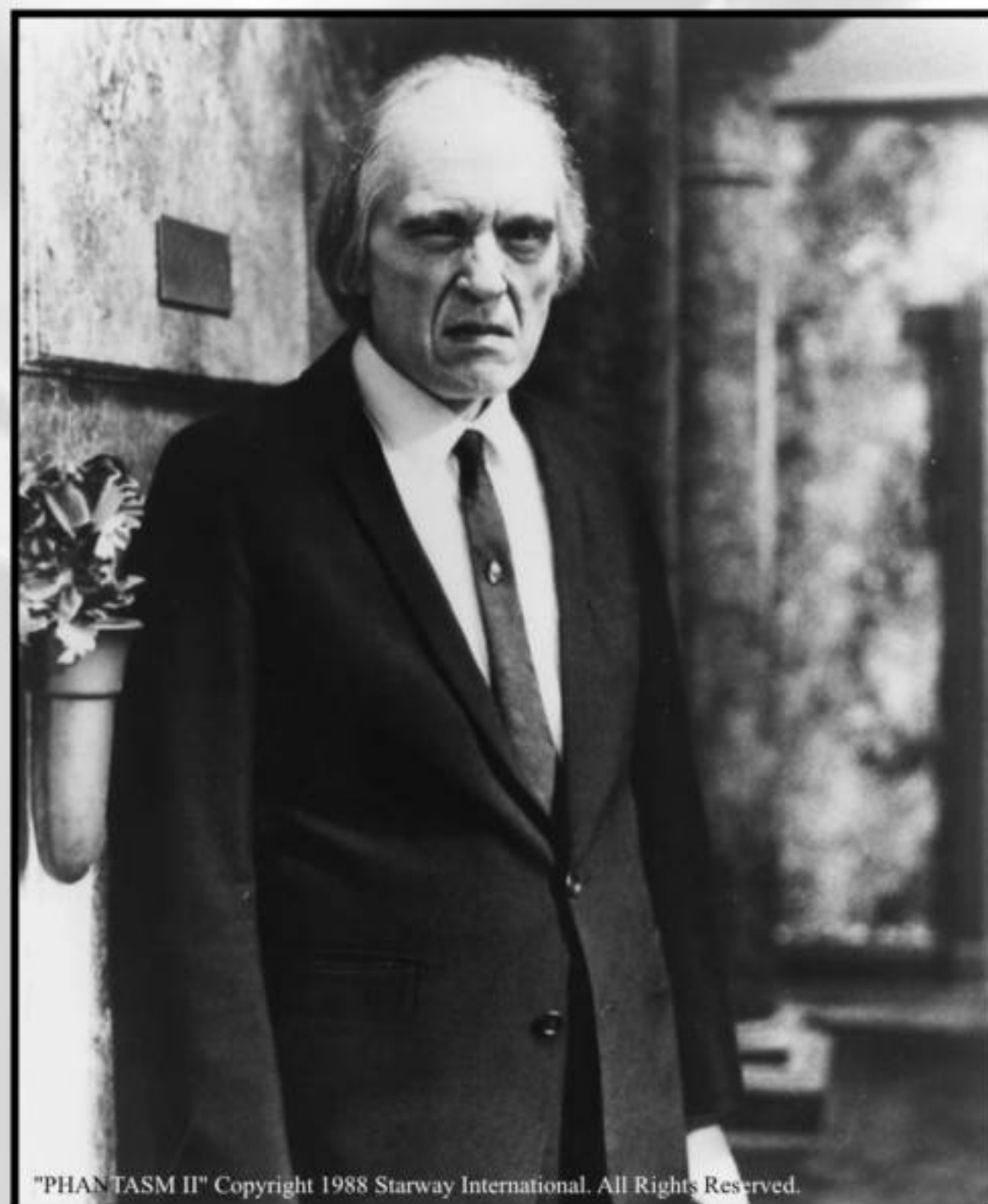
Reggie promises to take care of Michael and sends him to his room to pack some gear for a road trip in the Barracuda. So the entire movie is just a dream of Michael's? Not quite.

In the last scene the Tall Man surprises Michael in his room. Michael is pulled through the closet door by demonic hands, and dragged into the darkness just as the screen cuts to black. This movie is a great exercise in unconventional storytelling. Each scene is filled to the brim with something special. Helping to round out this classic horror piece is the awesome main theme by Fred Myrow and Malcom Seagrave. Definitely one of the best movie themes of all time!

Phantasm II (1988)

It took an entire decade for *Phantasm II* to hit the big screen. Throughout the 1980's, the success of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th* franchises led the bigwigs in Hollywood to say, "Hey, why not *Phantasm II*?" (Or at least that's how I see it) And I for one am very glad it happened, because the sequel is crazy good! With a bigger budget at hand, Don Coscarelli hits *Phantasm II* with more action, gore and bigger explosions than you could shake a sphere at!

The film begins by introducing a new character, a pretty young woman named Elizabeth Reynolds. She is being plagued by dreams of Michael Pearson and the Tall Man. Through her we're offered a retelling of the end of *Phantasm*, which perfectly segues into new footage. I love that Coscarelli decided to continue with



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Phantasm II by jumping right in where the first one left off. And considering we are talking about both films being ten years apart, that is *not* an easy task to accomplish. But it works rather well here.

This is also the film where Reggie Bannister becomes the ass-kicking fan favorite. Reggie races upstairs and sees the Tall Man for the first time (remember, almost all of *Phantasm* was Michael's dream). Reggie heads back downstairs to load up some shotguns and runs into the dwarfs. This time around, the dwarfs look and sound far more sinister and demonic than they



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did in the previous film. Reggie violently beats one to death with the handle of his shotgun. Once surrounded by dwarfs in the kitchen, he decides to turn all of the stove's gas burners to high. Reggie grabs Michael and jumps to safety out of a second-story window while the house explodes behind them. And I do mean the house *explodes*! This movie has a few rather large explosions, no computer graphics added, just dynamite and fire.

We then jump forward seven years to a much older Michael, he has been living in the care of a psychiatric clinic since the events of *Phantasm*. (Unlike the first film, Michael is now played by actor James Le Gros.) Michael ultimately talks his way out of medical care citing that he finally believes that the Tall Man was always just a figment of his imagination. But we know darn well that isn't true. The Tall Man is very real and still wrecking havoc on the living *and* the dead.

Michael heads to the nearest cemetery and starts digging up a few graves, all turning up empty. Reggie is concerned that Michael is still not altogether 'well in the head'. Reggie goes on to explain that he *didn't* actually blow up his own house saving Michael earlier, and that also was another one of Michael's

dreams. So, no Reggie doesn't believe Michael yet. But that all changes (for real this time, I swear!), when Michael has a new vision of Reggie's own house exploding due to the Tall Man's villainous influence, thus killing his wife and daughter. When Reggie sees this actually happen with his own two eyes, he then finally believes Michael. And again, this house explosion is just incredibly huge!

After losing his wife and daughter, Reggie vows to help Michael kill the Tall Man.

"Mike didn't need to ask me anymore, I enlisted for the duration." - Reggie

Reggie and Michael take to the road. Reggie is now the owner of the black Plymouth Barracuda, still absolutely badass in every way. In a great scene Michael and Reggie break into a hardware store to stock up on supplies. It is here that Reggie fashions together

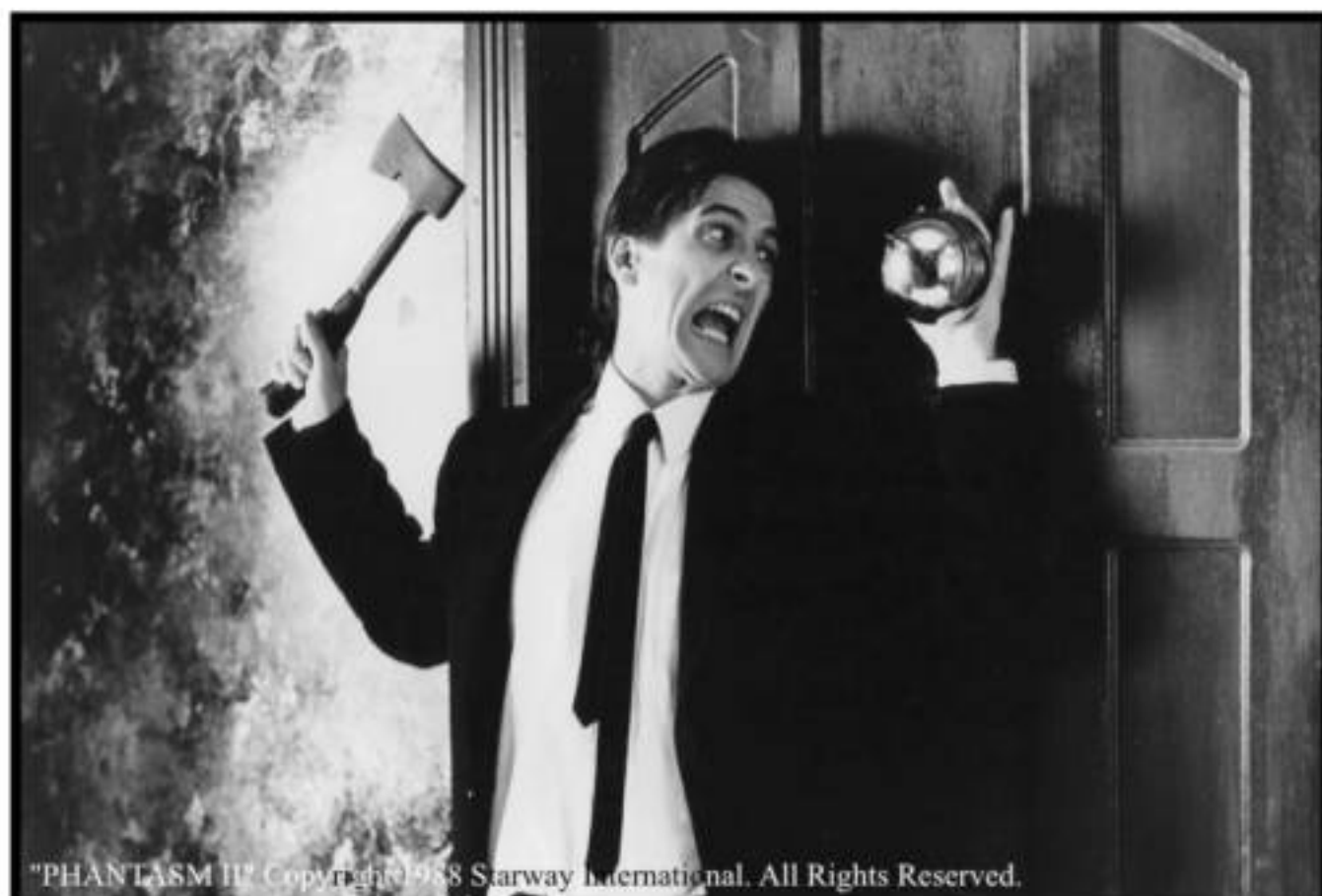
one of the best weapons in horror cinema, the **Quad-Barrel Shotgun**! Michael equips himself with a pretty awesome flame-thrower too. And because Reggie is still a gentleman and all-around awesome person, he leaves a huge wad of cash in the store's cash register. The man has class.

There is also a new form of villain that serves under the Tall Man: **Gravers**! These are rather large men in retro-style gas masks and dirty jumpsuits. It is their job to exhume the bodies of the already dead and buried. I enjoy the scenes with the Gravers as they are very menacing.

The Tall Man's trail leads Reggie and Michael to Perigord, Oregon. The Tall Man is now going from town to town, like a plague, and turning all of the dead into his slaves. Michael and Reggie pass through a few places that have already been hit, finding each location to be



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empty and shallow ghost towns.

Along the way Reggie decides to pickup a female hitchhiker who goes by the name Chemy. But Michael is wary because he has seen this woman before and believes she may be linked to the Tall Man. Elizabeth, on the other hand, also lives in Perigord. She is seen attending the funeral of her late grandfather. At the funeral, she does her own snooping around in the mausoleum and comes face-to-face with the Tall Man, thus confirming her beliefs in the many dreams she's been having. Later that evening the Tall Man takes Elizabeth's grandmother, and tells her to come to the mortuary if she ever wants to see her grandmother again. The priest in this film, who apparently was working with the Tall Man for an undisclosed amount of time, tries to help Elizabeth escape the mortuary. He is he put to a gruesome death by none other than a killer sphere. This one flies by, cutting his ear clean off, then comes back around and drills into his skull. Very bloody, very satisfying. Elizabeth manages to escape and on her way out through the cemetery she runs into Michael and Reggie. So all of our heroes have finally joined up. But it doesn't take long for the Tall Man to break into the safe-house and successfully kidnap Elizabeth. In the ensuing car chase, the Tall Man runs Michael and Reggie off the road, destroying the best muscle car in horror cinema. R.I.P. awesome car, for now.

In the final act, there is a very fun nod to the *Evil Dead* franchise. Elizabeth is brought to a crematorium chamber by one of the Tall Man's suited goons. The goon empties one of the burning chambers and pours all of the dust into a bag: the bag's nametag reads "Sam Raimi" (Sam Raimi is, of course, the creator of the *Evil Dead* movies).

With all of their weapons at hand, Michael and Reggie head out to save Elizabeth from the Tall Man. Elizabeth runs into Michael while being chased down by another one of the suited goons and we are introduced to a new *gold* sphere! This one is even more dangerous, it drills into the lower back of the goon and travels inside his body until it comes out of his mouth! Definitely a "ten" on the disturbing meter. *I can't help but feel bad for the unfortunate goon, he was only trying to do his job.*

Reggie, meanwhile is having the best fight in the entire movie. He is having it out with a Graver, and it's chainsaw against chainsaw! Reggie wins this epic fight and finally gets a chance to shoot his quad-barrel shotgun at four killer dwarfs. Watching Reggie fire that weapon is worth the price of admission alone!

Reggie, Michael and Elizabeth end up discovering the white room, much like the one at the end of the first film, with humming chrome cylinders. They finally defeat the Tall Man by pumping him full of yellow embalming fluid, but Reggie adds a gallon of hydrochloric acid to the batch. The Tall Man's skin burns off and his eyes explode; again a large amount of gore is present.

Do you believe the Tall Man is finally dead this time? No, I didn't either.

In the film's closing scene Reggie, Michael, and Elizabeth make a getaway in

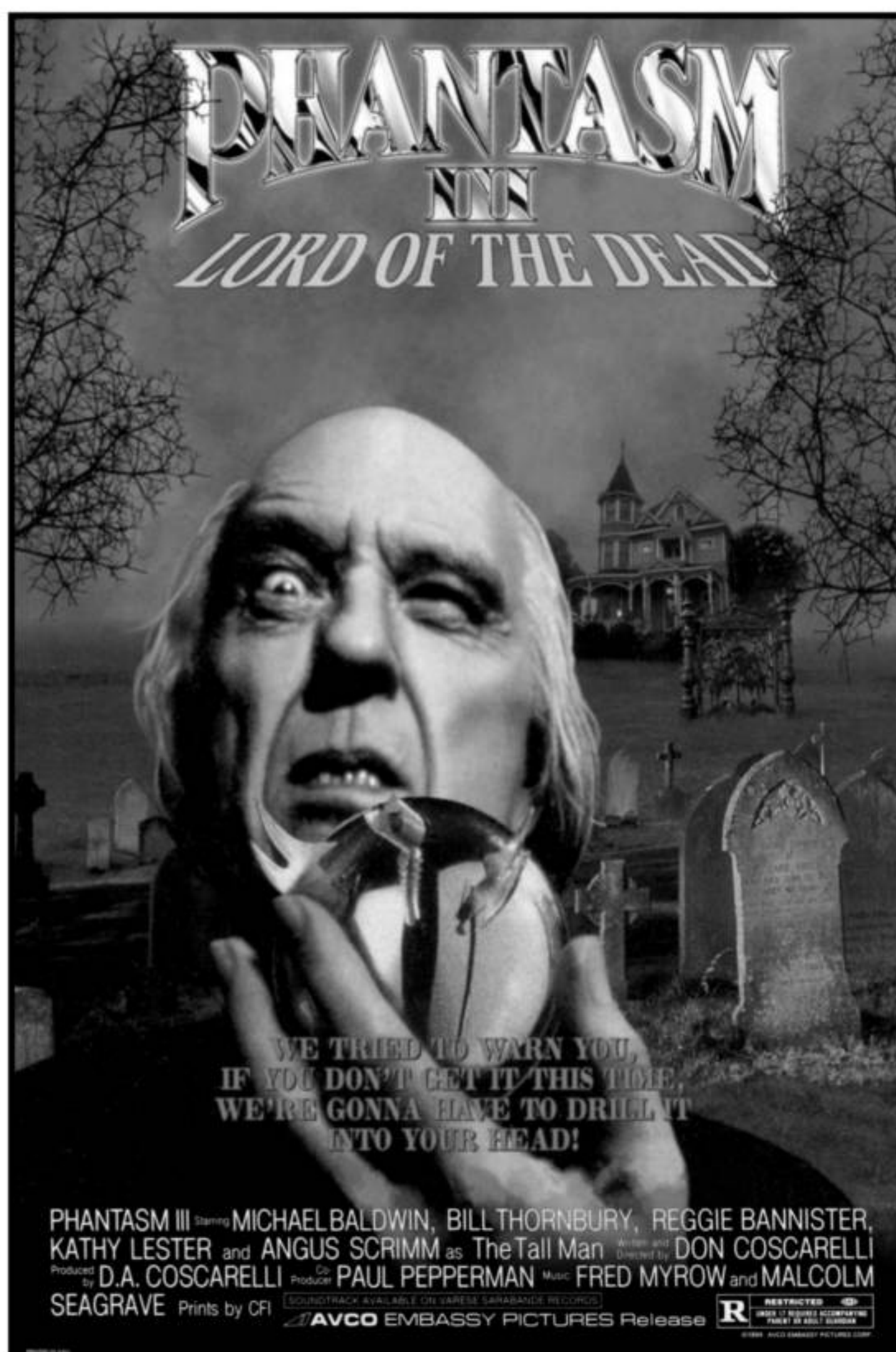
a hearse, driven by Chemy who makes a surprise return. Chemy's transformation into the Tall Man shouldn't have come as a surprise, but I really love that this one ends on yet another cliffhanger. Reggie gets thrown from the moving hearse, while Michael and Elizabeth are torn out of the moving vehicle. Cut to credits, movie over.

Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead (1994)

"And just when we think we've destroyed him, we must remember we can never trust the things we can see. Because nothing, is ever as it seems." - Michael Pearson

Truer words have never been spoken. *Phantasm III* hits us again, right where the last installment ended. A. Michael Baldwin returns to play Michael Pearson and it's evident early on that he brings back some of the magic that the second film might have been missing. Jody also makes a return too, played by the original actor, Bill Thornbury.

After being thrown from the moving hearse, Reggie runs back to the side of the road where Michael and Elizabeth are. Elizabeth is dead, her face is being eaten by a nasty little dwarf. Reggie discovers



Michael's unconscious body and blasts away four dwarfs with the Quad-barrel. The Tall Man makes an early appearance, wanting to finally take Michael with him. Reggie threatens to use a grenade to blow himself and Michael to kingdom come. The Tall Man, not wanting Michael in pieces, exits the scene. It seems that the Tall Man's goal is to capture Michael and that he has an 'ultimate' plan for him.

Reggie and Michael head back home, in a new Hemi-Cuda convertible (I guess Reggie bought a new one), and they find Jody sitting in the living room. Jody explains that he is indeed dead and doesn't have the power to stick around for very long. Afterwards, Jody turns into a sphere – crazy, I know. But this is a first for the *Phantasm* series, in that "Sphere Jody" is actually a good sphere.

The Tall Man again comes for Michael, this time defeating Reggie's efforts to stop him. Michael is finally taken away by the Tall Man, leaving Reggie and Sphere Jody to track him down.

Phantasm III also introduces us to a trio of thieves. Upon meeting them, Reggie is knocked unconscious (again) and is kidnapped. Even though the thieves are a threat, I can't help but see them as very silly characters. They all wear way too many gold chains, rings, and necklaces. This trio is supposed to be comic relief but, in the later stages of the film, I find that they ultimately drag it down in spots. Shortly thereafter, Reggie is saved by a new character, Tim, a young boy whose parents were also killed by the Tall Man. The three silly thieves are killed by Tim, after they break into his house.

Reggie does try to leave Tim in the care of normal people, but Tim sneaks back to follow him. And it's a good thing too, because Tim saves Reggie's life yet again. Reggie and another new character, a tough-as-nails woman named Rocky, are attacked by a rather dangerous killer sphere. Tim enters the scene quickly and shoots the sphere until it explodes.

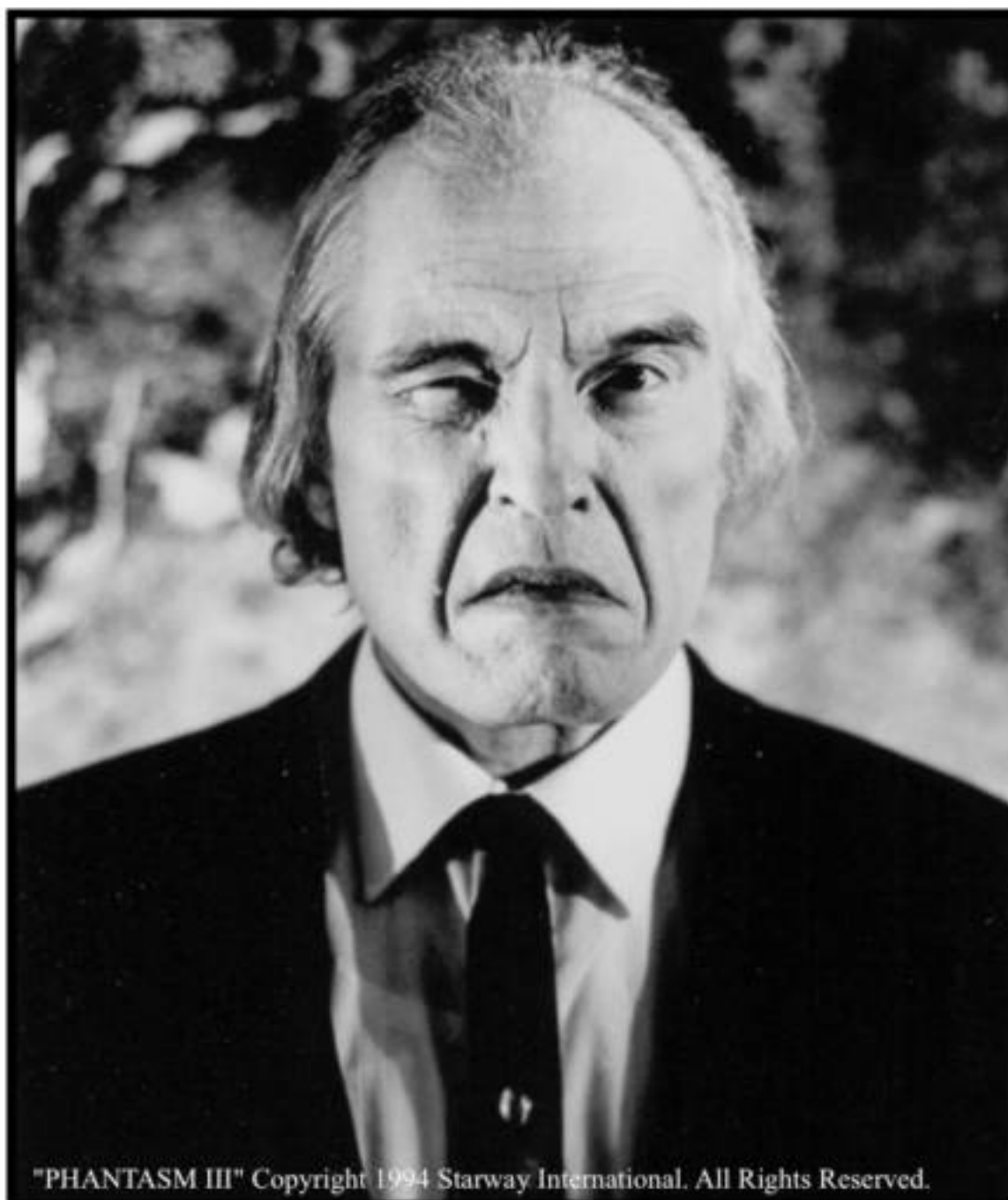
While camping out in the open desert, Reggie has a dream in which he is visited by Jody. One might say this is the first of Reggie's sex-capades, as Jody interrupts a dream in which Reggie is in bed with Rocky. In the dream, Jody

shows Reggie the path to Michael – and they do actually free him from the Tall Man, bringing Michael out of the dream via a pair of chrome cylinders. In a very funny sequence that follows, the Tall Man's hands get cut off and they turn into fleshy, sharp-toothed/four-legged little creatures. One runs directly up Reggie's pant leg and settles around his crotch. Rocky then takes out her large knife and cuts the creature out of Reggie's pants, the expression on Reggie's face is priceless! But now Michael joins Reggie, young Tim, and Rocky in the quest to finally bring down the Tall Man.

The three thieves from earlier make a return as dead versions of themselves, getting into a car chase with our group of heroes. The pink hearse that the thieves are driving ends up hitting a large rock and gets thrown into the air, flipping and spinning around. I have to admit, this is one hell of a car stunt!

Michael suggests they hide out in the

largest gothic mausoleum in the western United States, because that is the last place the Tall Man would expect to find them. That doesn't work out so well, as Michael gets captured by the Tall Man again and somehow the three thieves from before return *yet again* to run amuck on Reggie, Rocky, and Tim. It was at this point that I thought the whole undead thieves routine had run its course. The Tall Man does say some very important dialog here about how Michael's journey "*Has come full circle.*" And that Michael "*Has lived in this flesh construct long enough.*" The Tall Man then starts drilling away at Michael's skull with a crude mechanical device, promising to free him of his mortal boundaries. But

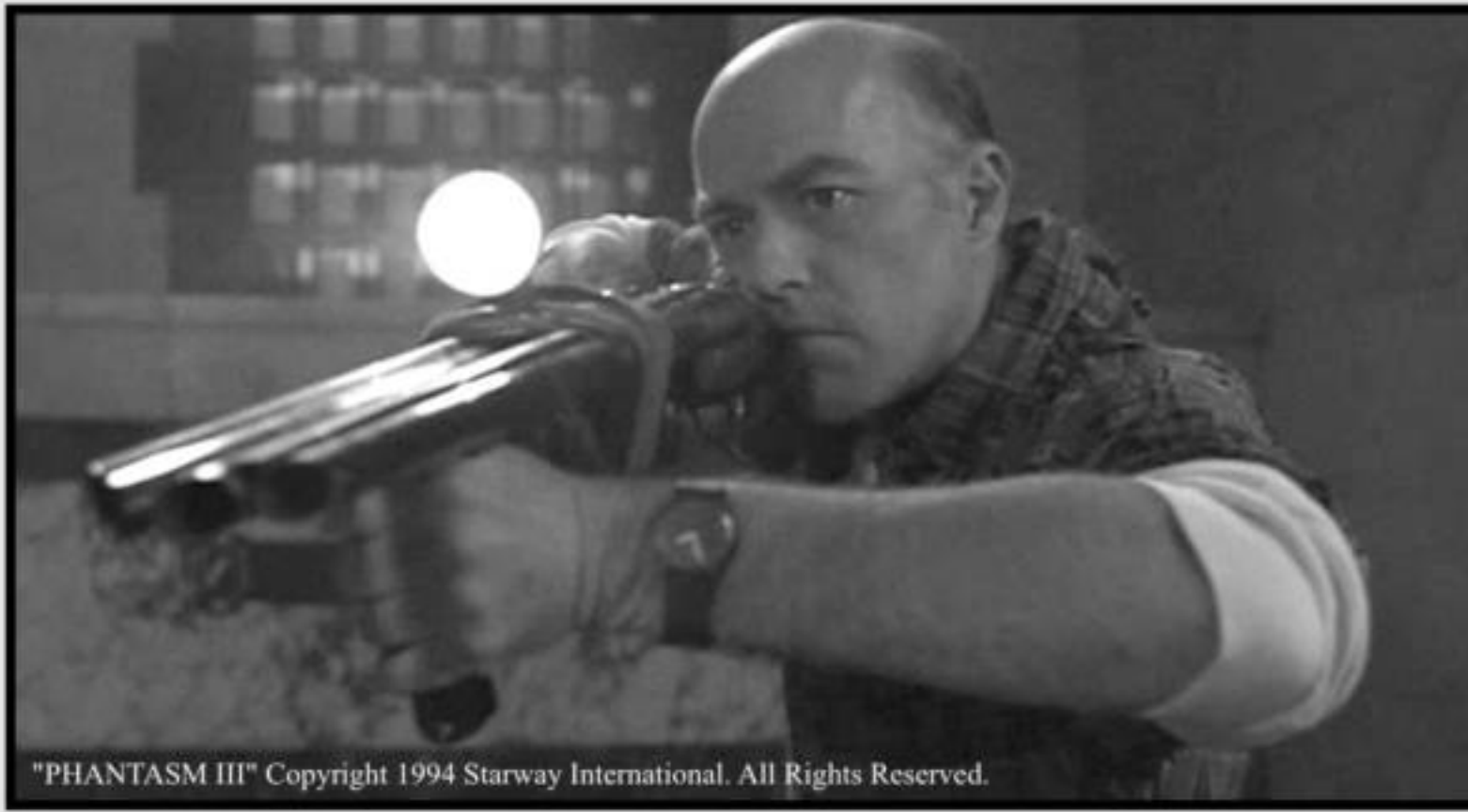


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With a penchant for showcasing mausoleums, the *Phantasm* films never lose their eerie atmo-sphere.



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Reggie and Rocky break up the party by stabbing the Tall Man with a long spear that was soaked in cryogenic liquid and trap him in a freezer room. He slowly freezes to death and a giant golden sphere bursts out of his head. The golden sphere, or "Tall Man Sphere" quickly starts to chase them down. Reggie finds a plunger and manages to catch the killer object on the end of it. With the help of Rocky and Tim, they wrestle the gold sphere into a vat of cryogenic liquid.

In the film's closing minutes Michael begins to peel back some of the skin on his forehead (where the Tall Man was operating) and discovers part of a sphere underneath his own skin! Could this foretell the possibility of an evil Michael? Michael walks off into the darkness, confused and scared of his new-found link with the Tall Man's legacy. Rocky decides to take her leave of fighting evil, which means Reggie and Tim are on their own. The cliffhanger for this installment has Reggie literally pinned up against the wall with over a dozen spheres pressed against him. Tim tries to help Reggie but gets grabbed and pulled through a window, vanishing from sight. And, once again, we cut to credits.

I enjoyed this film a lot. Every scene seemed to have something special and they really did try to capture the magic of the first *Phantasm*. All of the actors turned out incredible performances in their roles. However, if I had to pick a least favorite of the four films, this would be the one. There are some slapstick elements in *Phantasm III* that just feel out of place.

Phantasm IV: Oblivion (1998)

Some of the later films that exist inside any long standing franchise can make you think, "Oh wow, they really decided to go back to the original with this one." But in the case of *Phantasm IV*, they do go back to the original – literally!

This movie combines plenty of new footage, shot along with a plethora of deleted scenes from the first *Phantasm*. Now, someone who is more casual with their finances might argue that using already shot footage is a cheap way to round out a series. But I disagree. Both eras of *Phantasm*, old and new, co-exist together very well in this film.

It begins with a very beautiful (if I dare say) voiceover from Reggie as he explains what has happened so far. Michael has fled into the desert now,

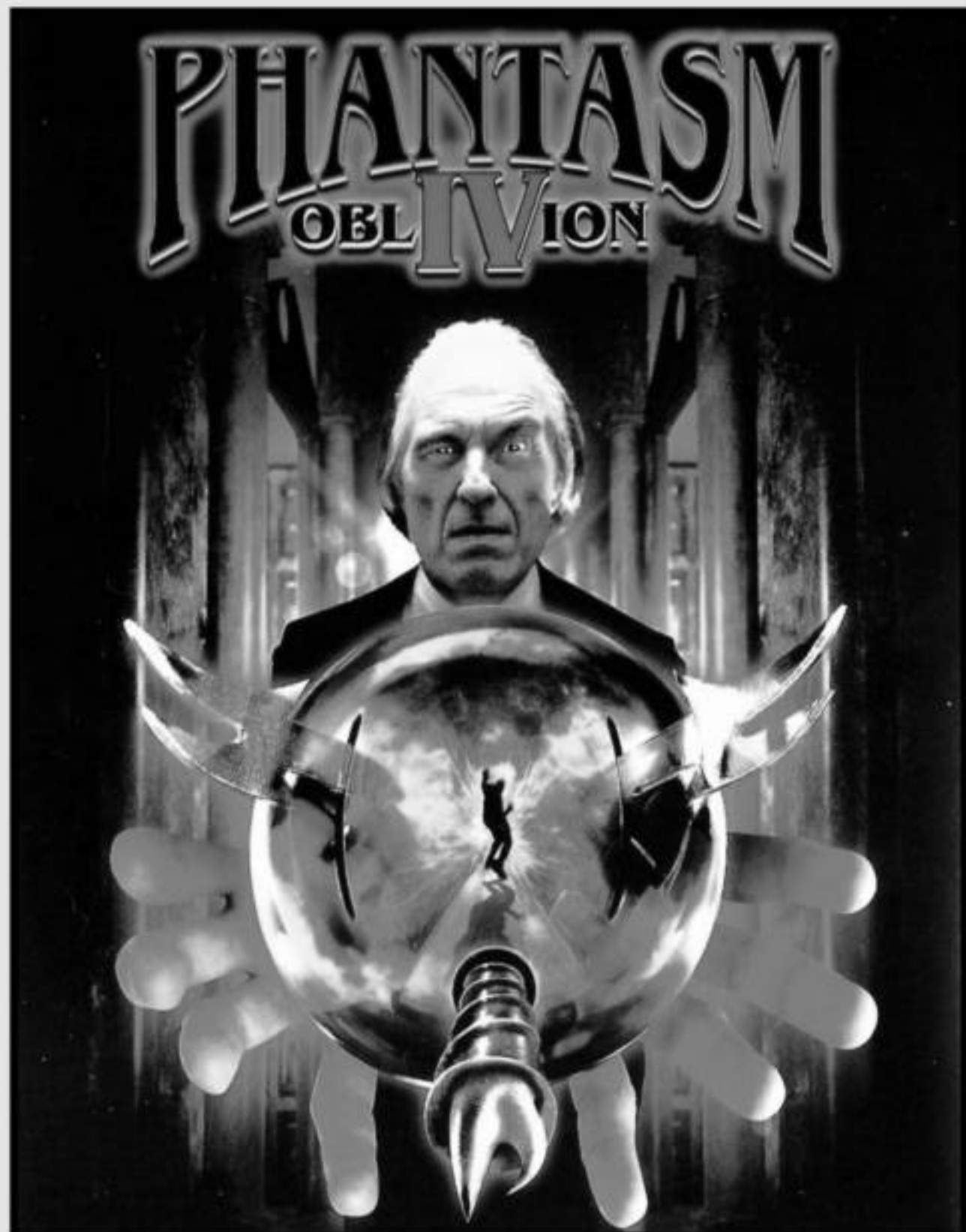
fearful of what the Tall Man has done to him and what he might still have in store. Reggie explains that he himself is still being held captive and pinned up by the Tall Man's spheres. But, surprisingly, our creepy villainous undertaker releases Reggie and tells him to prepare for the final game. All in all, a very epic beginning sequence.

The first use of vintage footage from the original film shows Michael running after Reggie's ice-cream truck. He catches up to it and innocently snatches an ice-cream bar from the back. I really enjoyed seeing the unused footage from the original 1979 film, even if it is something as simple as this early

scene. Also, the old footage looks incredibly clear! The second vintage scene depicts the Tall Man's initial arrival to Michael's hometown. While driving a hearse, it is implied, via sound effects, that the Tall Man runs over a dog. Damn you Tall Man, damn you. Kill as many humans as you like, but never a dog. That's weak!

Remember the fortune teller from the first movie? She returns, appearing in many of the new scenes. This is yet another reason why I think *Phantasm IV* connects to the original far more than the other sequels. The Tall Man appears to Michael and informs him that he is trapped inside the hearse and that it will drive itself to its destination. We learn that the Tall Man has the vehicle headed to death valley.

Reggie fixes up the old Hemi-Cuda and gets a hot tip from Sphere Jody in which direction to head if he wants to help Michael. But along the way poor Reg gets pulled over by a State Trooper, who actually turns out to be a demon in the employ of the Tall Man. This

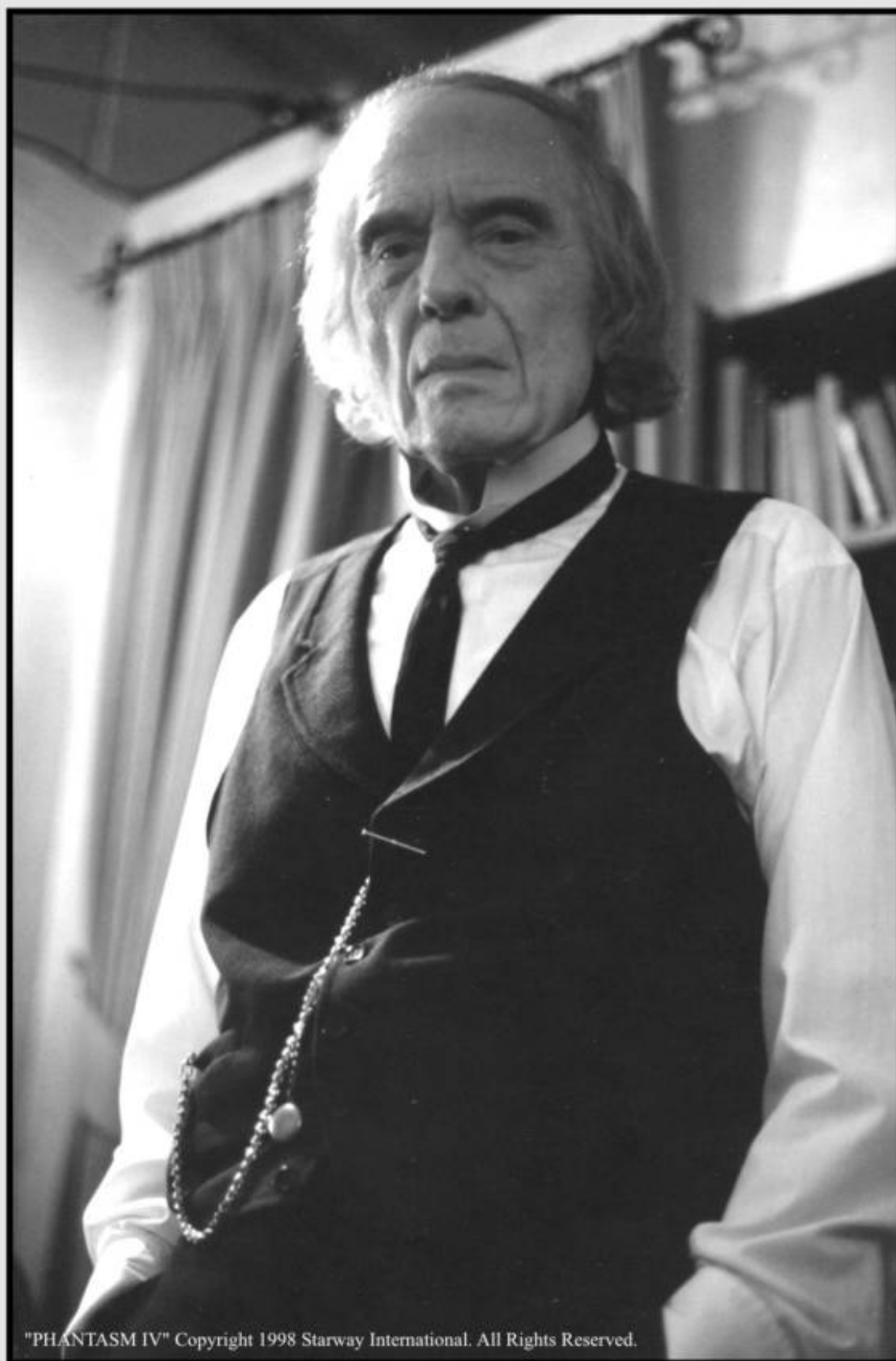


begins an entertaining battle between Reggie and the demon-trooper. Reggie discovers a mangled and, disturbingly, still alive corpse in the Trooper's trunk. Reggie pumps a few shotgun rounds into the Trooper's chest; in the middle of the battle, the Trooper vomits yellow goop directly into Reggie's mouth! Absolutely disgusting! Reggie traps the Demon-Trooper in the back of its own police cruiser and throws a lit road-flare into the gas tank. And with that we have yet another amazing explosion in the *Phantasm* series.

Michael is found stranded in the desert when the automatic hearse meets its destination. Michael isn't sure what kind of game the Tall Man is playing with him; another interesting piece of the puzzle is revealed when he has a strange dream depicting the Tall Man alive during the American Civil War. Michael gets the bright idea that if he tries to kill himself, the Tall Man will reveal himself. So Michael conveniently finds some rope and attempts to hang himself from the desert's one and only solitary tree. This prompts another deleted scene from the first *Phantasm*, which I suspect was originally an alternate ending. Young Michael is running away from the Tall Man, leading him into a trap where Jody tosses a noose around the sinister Tall Man's neck and hoists him up from a tree. But that night young Michael awakes from his sleep and goes back to cut the Tall Man down after the devious undertaker promises to simply just "go away." The film then quickly cuts back to Michael's noose, snapping free. The Tall Man approaches, offering a hand and asking Michael to join him. Now the first of Michael's "Jedi powers" are revealed when he wills into existence a chrome cylinder gateway and runs through it.

Michael is transported to what looks like some period near the end of the 19th century. Here he meets Jebediah Morningside. Who is that, you ask? He's the Tall Man, when he was still human. It appears that ole Jebediah has developed a crude way to cross dimensions using a primitive tuning-fork contraption, thus eventually bringing hell upon him and the world in the form of the Tall Man. It is very fun to see Angus Scrimm as a nice character and acting very pleasant towards Michael. He even offers him lemonade. Michael returns later with Jody, to watch Jebediah cross dimensions for the first time. Jebediah Morningside passes through the gateway, returning moments later as the Tall Man we all know and fear.

Meanwhile Reggie has been busy making a new friend. He saves a pretty woman, Jennifer, from a burning car. The two then take cover at an abandoned motel, making for the second in Reggie's attempted sex-capades. Of course she turns poor old Reg down – and the next morning her breasts turn into killer spheres. Yes that's correct, that *actually* happens. Reggie finds out that the tiny tuning fork he carries along with his guitar actually makes a frequency that destroys the sphere instantly. Reggie puts a sledge hammer to Jennifer and leaves, in search for Michael.



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What follows is a very interesting scene (although short) which has Michael passing through another gateway and ending up on the deserted streets of Los Angeles. The Tall Man is simply walking down the city street without a soul in sight. Jody appears and explains that Michael must leave because there is a risk of infection. He also implies that this place is in the not-too-distant future. Does the Tall Man eventually destroy the world? Seems like maybe he does.

In the film's finale, Reggie finally finds Michael and the hearse. Reg locks and loads his arsenal and changes back into his old ice-cream man uniform. Again, the connection with first film is blatant. Reggie blasts away a bunch of dwarfs before Michael appears with Jody and greets him. But the reunion is short lived when Michael tells Reggie that Jody can not be trusted. Reggie secretly slips Michael the tiny tuning fork and Michael heads back through the gateway with the now ominous Jody. After a failed attempt to kill Jebidiah Morningside (thinking that would prevent the Tall Man's original arrival) Michael meets up with Jody again in a dark cemetery. Jody attacks Michael with a sphere, but Michael is ready. He cuts his older brother, revealing the 'yellow blood of the damned'. So there you have it,



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Jody was evil the whole time. The two wrestle each other back through another gateway, landing Michael onto an operating table. Michael is held down while the Tall Man begins to drill away again at his skull. Fortunately, Michael slams down Reggie's tuning fork, causing the Tall Man to freeze. Michael uses this opportunity to move the Tall Man's saw-sphere into Jody's throat, cutting him badly. In his dying breath Jody explains to Michael that he did indeed die in the car wreck, many years ago.

Michael returns to the desert, alongside Reggie. The Tall Man also appears and makes quick work of Reggie, tossing him away like a rag doll. Michael reveals that he has engineered his own sphere, found in the engine of the hearse. This sphere stabs the Tall Man in the back of the head, which, obviously, doesn't kill him. But Michael again uses his telepathic powers to cause the hearse's engine to charge

up and overheat. It explodes in a huge ball of fire, engulfing the Tall Man. He's finally dead now, right? Wrong again. The Tall Man returns, but this time he simply walks over to Michael, briskly opens his skull, and removes a sphere. The Tall Man exits and Reggie learns that Michael is dying. It would seem that the Tall Man has finally decided to abandon his plans for Michael, leaving him for dead. But faithful Reggie grabs his quad-barrel and chases after the Tall Man.

In the final scene, we cut back to more deleted footage from the original. Here we have young Michael sitting next to Reggie in his ice cream truck. Reggie thinks he hears Michael whisper to him the words, "I'm dying." But Michael tells Reggie that it is only the wind. *It is only the wind.*

So there you have it. I'm positive that this article does not hold even one-eighth of the charm of the films. Neither does this piece do any justice to just how incredibly entertaining the *Phantasm* films are. *Phantasm* might exist as one of the most under-appreciated film sagas of all-time, which is a travesty. Angus Scrimm and Reggie Bannister are magnificent in their roles, and both actors have since become well established as horror film icons.

If you are a fan of fun horror films and you haven't yet seen a *Phantasm* movie, you owe it to yourself to watch them all.

And always hold out hope for a *Phantasm V*!

PHANTASM MERCHANDISE

Horror franchises like *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* have each spawned an impressive line of product tie-ins. While *Phantasm* may not have shared in that same 'sphere' of success, it *has* received a few very notable treasures for the discerning collector.



A 7" Tall Man with one of his evil little henchmen were finally immortalized in plastic under NECA toys' Cult Classics action figure line.



Thanks to ERTL, *Phantasm* fans could own a 1/18 sized limited edition die-cast replica of the 1971 Plymouth Barracuda from the original film.



In 2005, *Phantasm* received the ultimate DVD collector's set, with all four films housed in one of the series' iconic spheres!

Unfortunately, this set was only made available in the U.K.



Following the success of Tim Burton's visionary *Batman*, in 1990 CBS green lit a live-action television drama based on the DC Comic character, *The Flash*. *The Flash* was one of the most expensive shows on television to produce at the time, costing upwards of a million dollars per episode, and featured a soundtrack by Danny Elfman and costumes by Stan Winston, no strangers to big-budget cinema.

Ultimately, *The Flash* lasted but one season, airing from 1990-1991.

Considering the revival that the superhero genre has enjoyed in recent years, it is a perfect time to review this overlooked television show, over 20 years after its original run. Should Warner Bros. green light a film based on the character, comparisons to the original television series will be inevitable.

Overview

From the outset *The Flash* asserts itself as a bold, daring drama, with a rich cast of characters, complex relationships, novel special effects, and a dash of science fantasy. The emotional anchor of the show is John Wesley Shipp's inspired portrayal of Barry Allen, a

forensic detective who, as a consequence of a freak lab accident, acquires the unwanted ability to move at incredible speeds. A reluctant hero, Barry uses his powers to resolve one city crisis after another, and conceals his identity as the mysterious and enigmatic costumed vigilante "The Flash."

Like any compelling drama, the show's driving force is the array of relationships that enmesh its lead and the tragic circumstances that launch the series. In the pilot, Barry's older brother, police captain Jay Allen, is brutally murdered by the psychopathic leader of a terrorist motorcycle gang. Living in the shadow of his brother's rising star and police heroics, Barry must now earn a greater measure of his father's approval, who, as a retired beat cop, doesn't think of a lab detective as a 'real' police officer. Barry must, in turn, become a father figure for his now orphaned nephew.

Barry's relationship with Dr. Christina McGee, the putative romantic interest and the STAR Labs scientist who treats Barry after the lab accident and monitors his health, is equally complicated. Dr. McGee ("Tina") is selfishly motivated to help Barry for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study his powers and advance her work. Barry suffers numerous side effects



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Acting and Characters

The acting throughout the series is uneven, although it exceeds in quality what would be expected in the genre at the time. The standout is John Wesley Shipp's lead. Without a hint of naiveté, Shipp delivers his lines with equal parts earnestness and gravitas. Shipp's character is no young cadet, but a veteran officer (perhaps mid-30s) who has obviously suffered personal and professional disappointments. Shipp brilliantly blends earnest and passionate good cop demeanor with grizzled veteran calm. Perhaps lacking the full range of a Geoffrey Rush or a Derek Jacobi, he provides the inflective emotionally resonant delivery of a studied and veteran actor who takes his role seriously. Shipp brings greater dimensionality than any of the actors that have played Batman and a more authentic moral compass than

even Christopher Reeves' Superman. Perhaps the most memorable moment of the series is Barry Allen's stirring conversation with his young nephew Shawn, just after his father's (Barry's brother's) funeral in the epilogue of the pilot.

The pilot sets the tone and establishes most of the character relationships in the series, but – with few exceptions – the rest of the series rarely advances or resolves the show's fundamental tensions. Although there are several scenes between the pair mid-series, Barry's relationship with his nephew Shawn is barely touched on again. Although his relationship with Tina deepens into an enduring and meaningful friendship, the hint of romantic possibility is never resolved. As a lead, Amanda Pays portrayal of Dr. McGee is less

from using his powers, including metabolic blackouts and a voracious appetite. Tina provides the suit (derived from a Soviet prototype), and helps Barry understand and cope with his powers.

An undercurrent of sexual attraction between the pair is ambiguously toyed with throughout the series, but never resolved, ala Bruce Willis and Cybil Shepherd in *Moonlighting*. When they meet, Barry has just been dumped by his girlfriend, the young and fashionable (usually shown wearing a Blossom hat) Iris West. Barry missed the opening of her gallery due to a blackout, and as the series begins, she announces a move to Paris to pursue her art career. Throughout the series, Barry and Tina's working relationship teeters on the precipice of romance, but events always seem to intervene.



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By day Barry Allen may be a forensic scientist, but at night he assumes the role of The Flash in his pursuit to take down the ruthless criminals of Central City.

convincing. She simply lacks Shipp's acting chops, although she performs a serviceable background role throughout the series.

More one-dimensional are the array of relationships Barry has outside of his family – from his boss, Lieutenant Garfield to his lab partner, Julio Mendez. These characters are rarely given significant screen time, and when they are, they serve plot advancement or comic relief rather than character development.

With very few exceptions, the villains in the show range from aggressively uninteresting to morbidly hokey. The show's greatest strength are the leads and the rich cast of recurring characters that provide a sense of realism and verisimilitude. In some sense, *The Flash* is an ensemble production, with the same dozen characters weaving in and out of the show from episode to episode. Many of the faces throughout the series are familiar character actors from that TV era. Notable highlights from the ensemble cast include Richard Belzer's Joe Kline, Dick Miller's Fosnight, and Emmet Walsh's Henry Allen. Richard Belzer (better known for *Law & Order: SVU*) plays the slimy TV anchor and "Voice of the City" Joe Kline. Dick Miller's small time con-man 'Fosnight' is an erstwhile police informant and sympathetic figure.

Barry's lab partner, Julio Mendez, played by

First Superman.
Then Batman.
Now thrill to...

THE FLASH

The feature-length movie pilot
that spawned the
critically-acclaimed TV series.

SPECIAL 2-HOUR PREMIERE

It will happen only once.

And when it does,
you'll want to be there.

Witness the creation.



His justice is fast. And furious.

THE ULTIMATE AVenger

THE FLASH™



THE VILLAIN

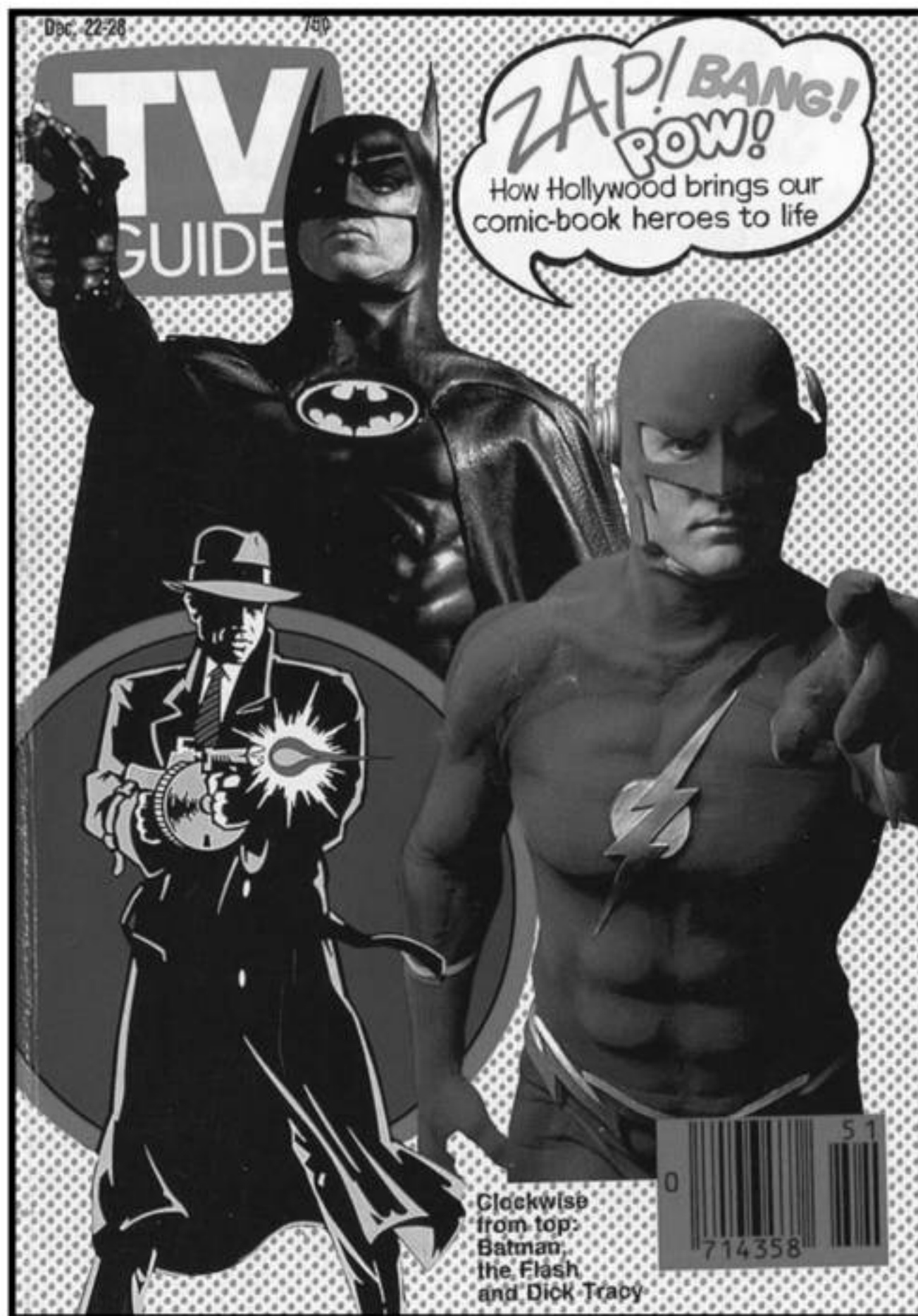


THE HERO



THE HEROINE

The critically acclaimed feature-length movie pilot.



Alex Desert, is a hip and likeable presence who offers comic relief by pointing out Barry's fashion faux pas', and by trying to set Barry up on nightmare dates while trying to manage his own rocky relationship. Officers' Murphy and Bellows partnership also provides a hysterical comic element to the series, without being campy. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Barry Allen's golden retriever, Earl, who provides both comic relief and, oddly enough, emotional dimensionality.

The two most notable characters to appear only a few times, aside from the motorcycle gang leader Nicholas Pike, are Megan Lockhart, a sultry female lead who is instantly recognizable to fans of 1980s television, and Desmond Powell, the hospital administrator and retired vigilante Nightshade (shades of *Watchmen* with generational/retired superheroes). Both actors generate critical inflexion points in the series, one as a serious love interest and the other as a respected mentor.

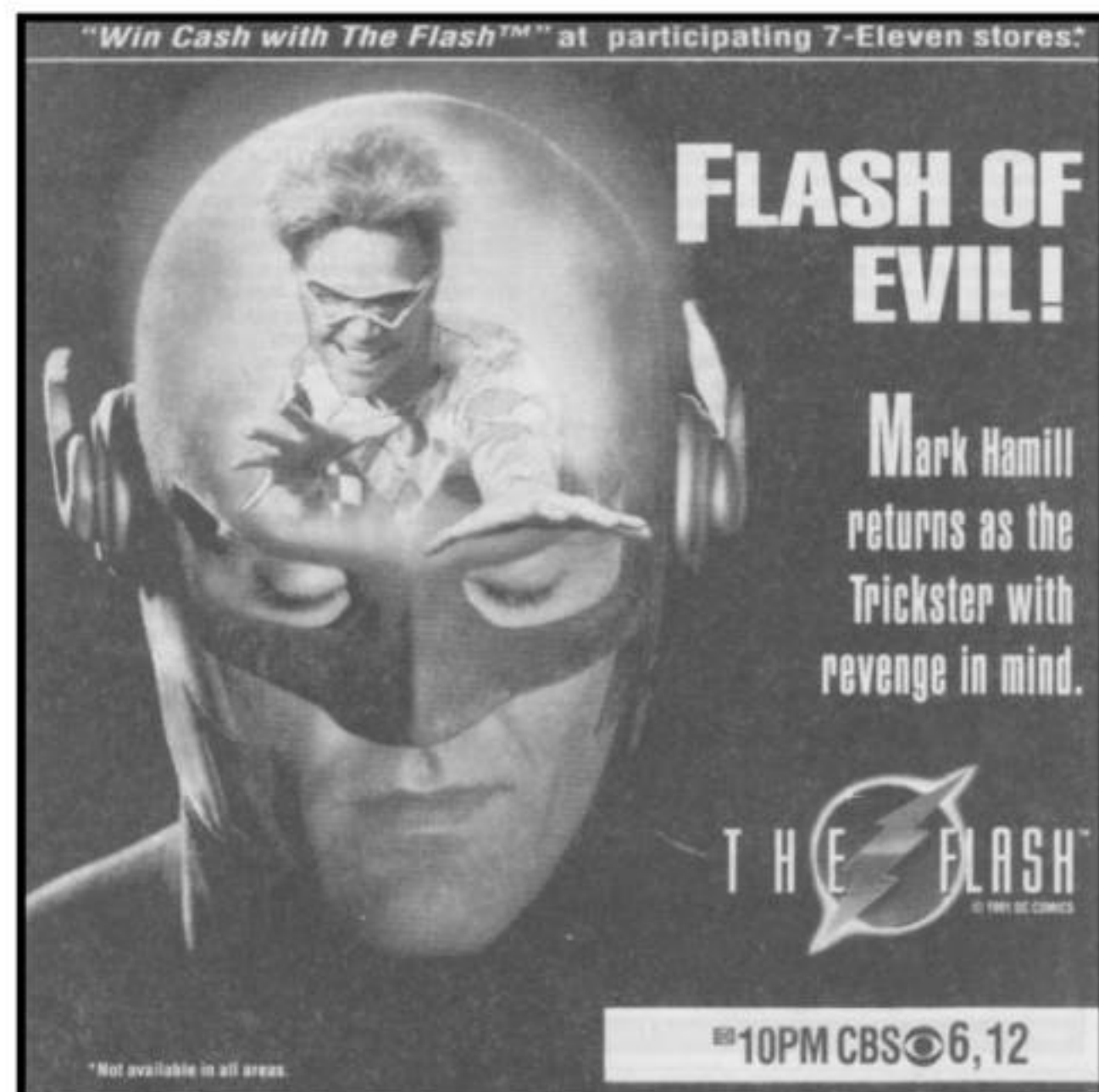
Setting, Style and Tone

Underscoring a more substantial problem, the style and tone of the show is confused. The pilot reveals a city under siege, overcome by crime and gangs, less expressionistic than Tim Burton and Anton Furst's stylized vision of Gotham City in *Batman*, but no less gritty or dark. The darkness is distinctly modern, with motorcycle gangs in late 1980s punk fashion, jewelry, hair style, and all. In a later episode (E21: "Alpha"), the leads run into a nightclub styled to the 1990s, with the DJ playing the dance anthem Everybody Dance Now.



However, the third episode ("E3: Watching the Detectives") jettisons that mood and tone and introduces a 1940s noir style with retro-stylized gangsters (rather than punk), and art deco design rather than contemporary, but stylized. The remainder of the series uncomfortably meshes these two styles. In one scene, an art deco 1940s automobile will be parked in the street next to a modern 1980s police sedan. Some of the episodes abandon all pretense of style or place, and seem removed entirely from the city introduced in the pilot ("E2: Out of Control"). The result is a confused mess.

While seemingly a superficial complaint, it turns out that the confused style underscores a more substantive problem with the series. The writers can't seem to agree on a consistent tone for the show, and as a consequence, the series lacks a consistent identity. The best parts of the series are those that firmly anchor the series in the context of a late 1980s/early 1990s major American metropolis – the time and place it was filmed. While the darker episodes, in general, seem to be among the strongest, being dark doesn't make the



episodes better. Some episodes stray too far into science-fiction unreality, and lose the viewers interest. But far and away the weakest episodes of the series are campier, retro-stylized, and non-coincidentally, more far-fetched plots and cheesy villains. The correlation between style and substance is unmistakable in the uneven quality across episodes.

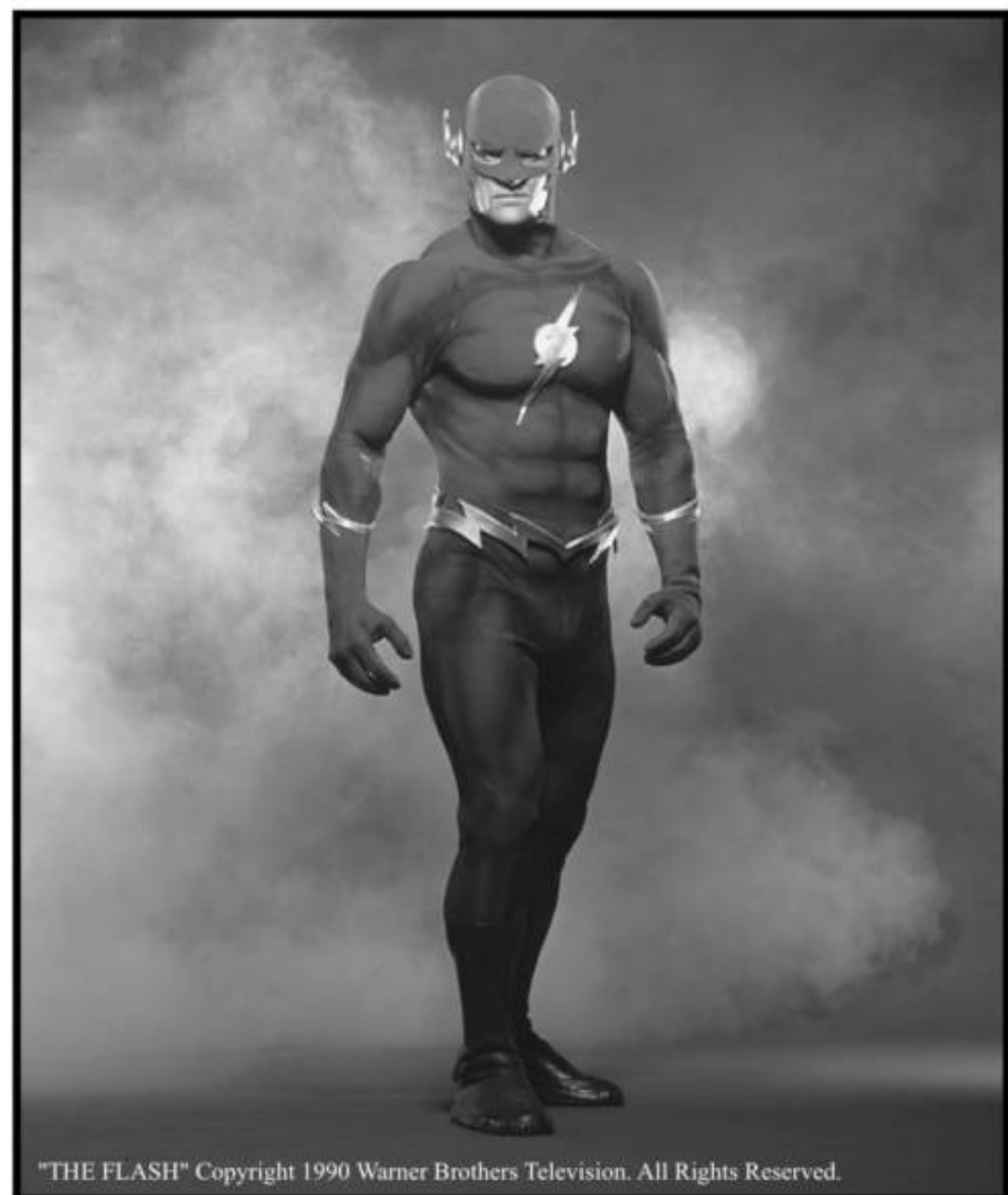
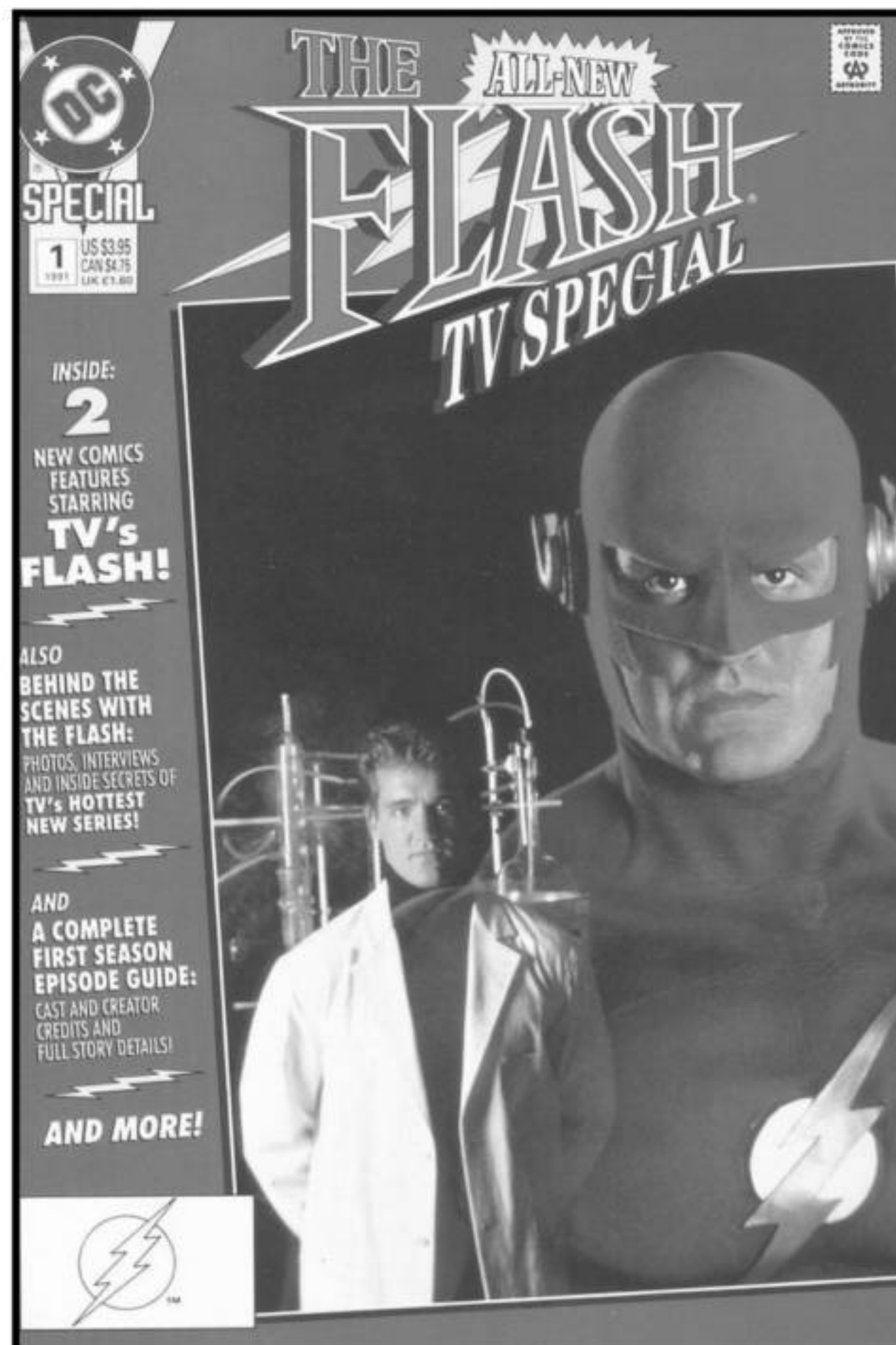
The Best and the Worst

The best episode of the series, in my opinion, is the pilot, followed by “Beat the Clock” (E11), “Sight Unseen” (E10), “Captain Cold” (E17), and “The



Deadly Nightshade” (E16). Each of these episodes are flawed, but none of them feature the worst elements of the series.

“Beat the Clock” is a detective centric episode concerning a brilliant jazz musician who is wrongly convicted of murder, and must be exonerated before his execution. Barry’s lab partner, Julio Mendez, plays a larger



role in the episode, and there are many scenes at a jazz club. Even more of a police drama is the episode “Sight Unseen,” which has Barry and Tina essentially working against both federal investigators and their own department, trying to piece together clues to solve a theft.

“Captain Cold” is a nice blend police/gangster drama and science fantasy. This is part *Hard Boiled* and part Ray Bradbury. It is also notable because it transforms a cheesy villain into a dangerous, calculating murderer. The episode cleverly juxtaposes the sweltering summer heat (ala *Do The Right Thing*) with an assassin that kills by freezing his victims.

The worst episodes are those that feature more science fantasy than police drama, more unbelievable villains than selfishly motivated, but ultimately understandable, characters. When the series veers too far into campy science-fiction (“Twin Streaks” or “Out of Control”) or campy retro-stylized villains (“The Trickster”), it loses much of its luster. When the series stays true to police drama with milder or more sedate science-fiction elements and an emphasis on the leads, the series is at its best. There is no point at which the series “jumps the shark” because the strongest run is the final half dozen episodes, where the writers seem to have a better handle on what works and what doesn’t.

Conclusion

In retrospect, *The Flash* is a remarkable and unforgettable series, but ultimately a failed attempt to launch a superhero revival beyond Batman. The constitutive elements that could have made *The Flash* more than a one season television experiment are the same elements that ultimately produced Bryan Singer’s *X-Men*, Sam Raimi’s *Spider-Man*, and Christopher



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Nolan's *Batman*. By the late 1990s, the brief revival inspired by Tim Burton's *Batman* had sputtered out for the same reasons that *The Flash* failed.

The *Batman* series had turned to camp under the direction of Joel Schumacher. The expressionistic stylings of Tim Burton provided the needed serious tone for a successful superhero film, but perhaps the trappings that ultimately led to its demise. Style is no substitute for substance. The success of the other

is both a product of strong leads, human drama, and an emotional core that ties them all together. The pilot of *The Flash* promised all of that and more. Unfortunately, largely because of poor screenwriting, it did not live up to that promise.

Just as *Smallville* meshed teen drama/angst into a superhero twist, *The Flash* could have melded police drama with science fantasy. "Beat the Clock," "We Are Detectives," and "Sight Unseen," among others, suggest how. *Lois & Clark*, *Smallville* and *Heroes* demonstrated that live action superheroes can have a home on television longer than a season by adopting the best parts of *The Flash* while avoiding the same mistakes. *The Flash* showed brilliant promise in a thrilling pilot, and that promise suggests the strong possibility for the character on the big screen, as long as Warner Bros. avoids the mistakes it made over twenty years ago.

Stephen Menendian is the Assistant Director of the Haas Institute at UC Berkeley and a licensed attorney.

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BLOOD RELATIONS:

Gerardo de Leon and Vampirism

By Bryan L. Yeatter

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"Look; through that gate – a river of blood. Hurry. *Hurry!*"
Celia Rodriguez as Tanya in *The Blood Drinkers*

I would like to propose a toast. I say we all raise a glass in tribute to good, old-fashioned American exploitation. As you are no doubt aware from the title of this piece, the subject here is Filipino filmmaker Gerardo de Leon, so you may be wondering why we are beginning by trumpeting the art of U.S. exploitation (yes, I used the word "art"). Well, the truth is that, were it not for film producers and distributors like Kane W. Lynn, Roger Corman and Sam Sherman, Western audiences would likely never have seen de Leon's work. The few titles in his considerable catalogue of work that managed to escape the domestic market of the Philippines can all be traced to those men, and in particular, the two vampire films from the mid-1960s that we'll be examining would apparently not exist in any form if they had not been picked up for global distribution by Lynn's Hemisphere Pictures.

The sad fact is that the vast majority of the considerable cinematic output of the Philippines from the silent era through the 1980s is gone. Even Hollywood was slow to catch on to the ravages of time on perishable nitrate film stock, but add in a humid tropical climate such as that in the Philippines and, well, it compounds the problem considerably. And whereas Hollywood might strike a good number of prints for

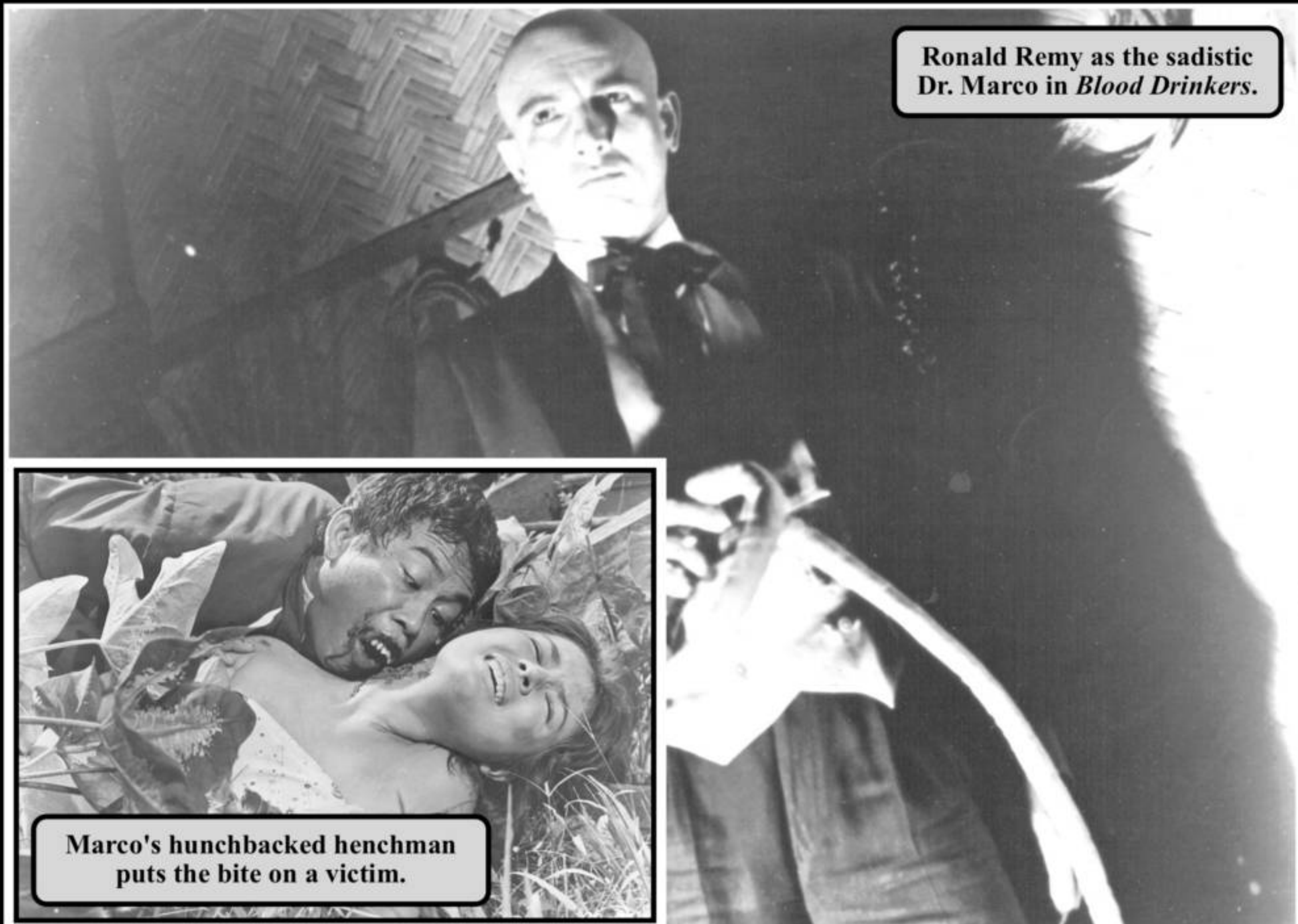
distribution (initially in 35mm for theaters, later in 16mm for television), few prints were necessary in the Philippines. A handful would suffice, making the rounds from province to province, island to island; once those prints made their tour, who knows where they ended up while the negatives rotted in some sweating warehouse.

There aren't many names in Philippine cinema that can stand alongside Gerardo de Leon, so one might have hoped that his works would have been given some extra consideration. But the sole remaining print of one of his most acclaimed films, *Noli me Tangere* (*Touch me Not*; 1961), was only restored in recent years through the efforts and expense of the German government. Okay, kudos then to the Germans for preserving art. As for U.S. exploitation, well, we'll take our art where we find it. De Leon was hardly a candidate for thoughtful regard among Western critics, his international exposure being almost singularly through horror and exploitation films. Although these genres have gotten more genuine consideration in recent years, they have traditionally been dismissed by critics who yearn to be taken as seriously by others as they take themselves. The work may have been significant as an expression of the culture from which it came, but that was likely to have little impact on critics almost entirely ignorant of the culture and wholly disinterested in the genre. It needs to be said that this is perhaps more illustrative of the shortcomings of certain critics than of the material itself. Film criticism in general has traditionally been inclined toward concise

categorization, which is likely why Filipino films have had a hard time in much of the rest of the world. Not unlike the culture that birthed it, Philippine cinema seems obstinate in its refusal to line up on queue, incorporating many and varied an array of influences, exhibiting as much of the Western impressions it absorbed through the centuries as the Asian characteristics that are a part of its natural heritage.

Like every other part of the world, the Philippine islands have their own vampire lore, but creatures like the aswang and manananggal are a bit more novel than the usual legends. The manananggal is a bat-winged humanoid that divides at the waist, its upper half flying off in search of victims while the lower torso dutifully remains behind awaiting the return of the upper body. The aswang is a shape shifter with a long, tentacle-like tongue that enters the navel of pregnant women and sucks the blood of the unborn fetus (I would characterize it as a ghoulish abortionist, but aren't they all). These legends have been covered in Philippine films since the silent era, but de Leon's two vampire films remained largely within more familiar structures. They are both unique in their way, however, and set themselves apart from run-of-the-mill vampire fodder, largely through fascinating cultural and psychological subtexts. Both are, in some manner, an assault on the concept of family, turning the most acknowledged foundational cornerstone of every culture into its most heinous, flagitious force, imprisoning the individual within its narrow confines and swallowing their identity.

Adapted to the screen in 1964 from a Filipino comic book serial, *Kulay Dugo ang Gabi* (*Blood is the Color of Night*) gave us a character that could perhaps have come only from the wonderfully imaginative medium of comics. Dr. Marco (Ronald Remy) is a vampire, who also happens to be a mad scientist. If you think about it, who is better equipped to delve into the world of mad science than a vampire? Their accumulation of knowledge through the ages gives them the tools, and their lack of conscience eliminates the one obstacle that likely prevents more ordinary scientists from taking the leap off the bridge into mad science. But Dr. Marco is even more complex; he is also quite the romantic, hopelessly in love with Katrina (Amalia Fuentes), who is dying – in fact, may have already died. As the film opens, a horse-drawn hearse brings Katrina's coffin to the family villa to be entombed in the family vault. As Katrina's mother (Mary Walter) stands by, Marco oversees the entombment before swinging into action with his weird entourage. Accompanied by a dwarf, a cloven-hoofed hunchback and a beautiful (if relentlessly dour) woman named Tanya (Celia Rodriguez), Marco enters the tomb and fires up his mad doctor equipment; he's got gizmos with enough beeping, spinning and blinking parts to give any mad doctor wet dreams. It doesn't take long for him to revive Katrina, but as she is too weak to rise up, Marco concludes that a heart transplant is in order. The ideal donor is Katrina's twin sister, Charito (Fuentes again); the two were separated as young



Ronald Remy as the sadistic Dr. Marco in *Blood Drinkers*.

Marco's hunchbacked henchman puts the bite on a victim.

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children, the first suggestion of shameful family skeletons, as the mother later explains that the girls were the result of an illicit union. The father would ultimately commit suicide, while Charito was sent to live with her uncle and aunt; the mother then fled with Katrina.

How Katrina and her mother ultimately met up with Dr. Marco and his collection of misfits is never made clear, but seeing Marco as the only hope of saving Katrina's life, the mother reluctantly goes along with his plan, even to the point of agreeing to lure Charito to the villa to act as heart donor. The main obstacle to the plot is initially the intervention of Charito's new beau (Eddie Fernandez), but of course the mother's conscience eventually prevents her from following through. Ultimately Charito is saved (and Katrina, presumably, is not) through the intervention of a priest and his local congregation, who chase Marco and his group into the jungle. While Tanya and the hunchback perish, Marco and his dwarf vanish in a mist.

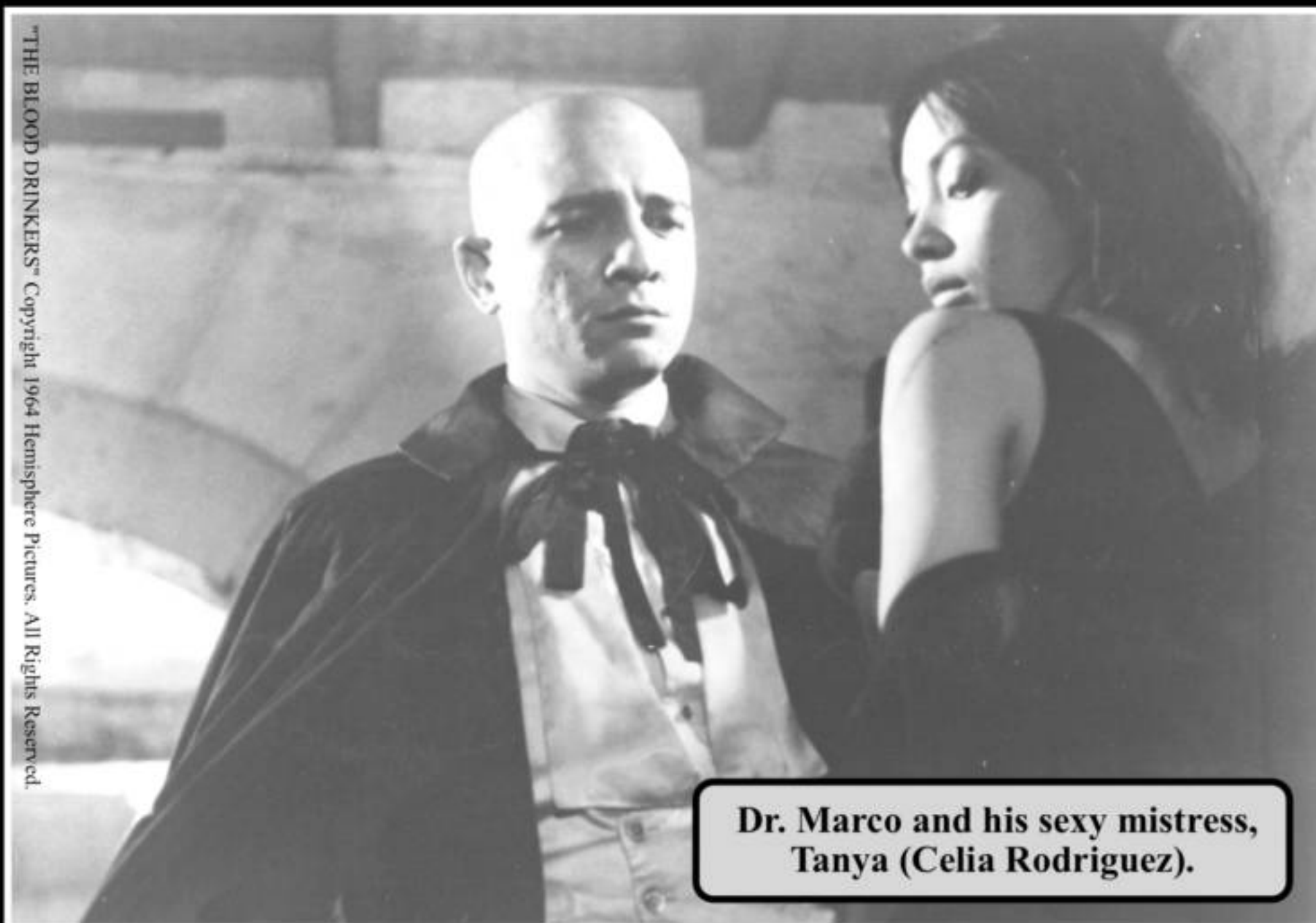
The idea of combining the genre's two most time-honored villains (the vampire and the mad doctor) is an admirably inventive, if kitschy, gimmick. Perhaps two parts vampire and one part mad scientist, Dr. Marco is quite an interesting amalgam of character traits; consistent with his vampiric nature he is sadistic, cruel and domineering, while the mad doctor in him is most evident in his selfish single-mindedness in pursuing his

ambition irrespective of how many lives must be sacrificed to accomplish it. "Her death is of no consequence," he says of Charito. "Katrina needs her heart." He is often the figure of the conventional vampire in his best evening wear and cape, but also seems to have been ahead of his time, dressing down and appearing in casual attire from time to time. When Charito arrives at the villa she walks in to find Marco and Tanya hanging out at the piano in their shades and dark clothing, looking like a couple of sullen Greenwich Village hipsters. More than once Marco sports a black turtleneck and new wave wraparound shades, while Tanya frequently looks quite the mod in her '60s prints.

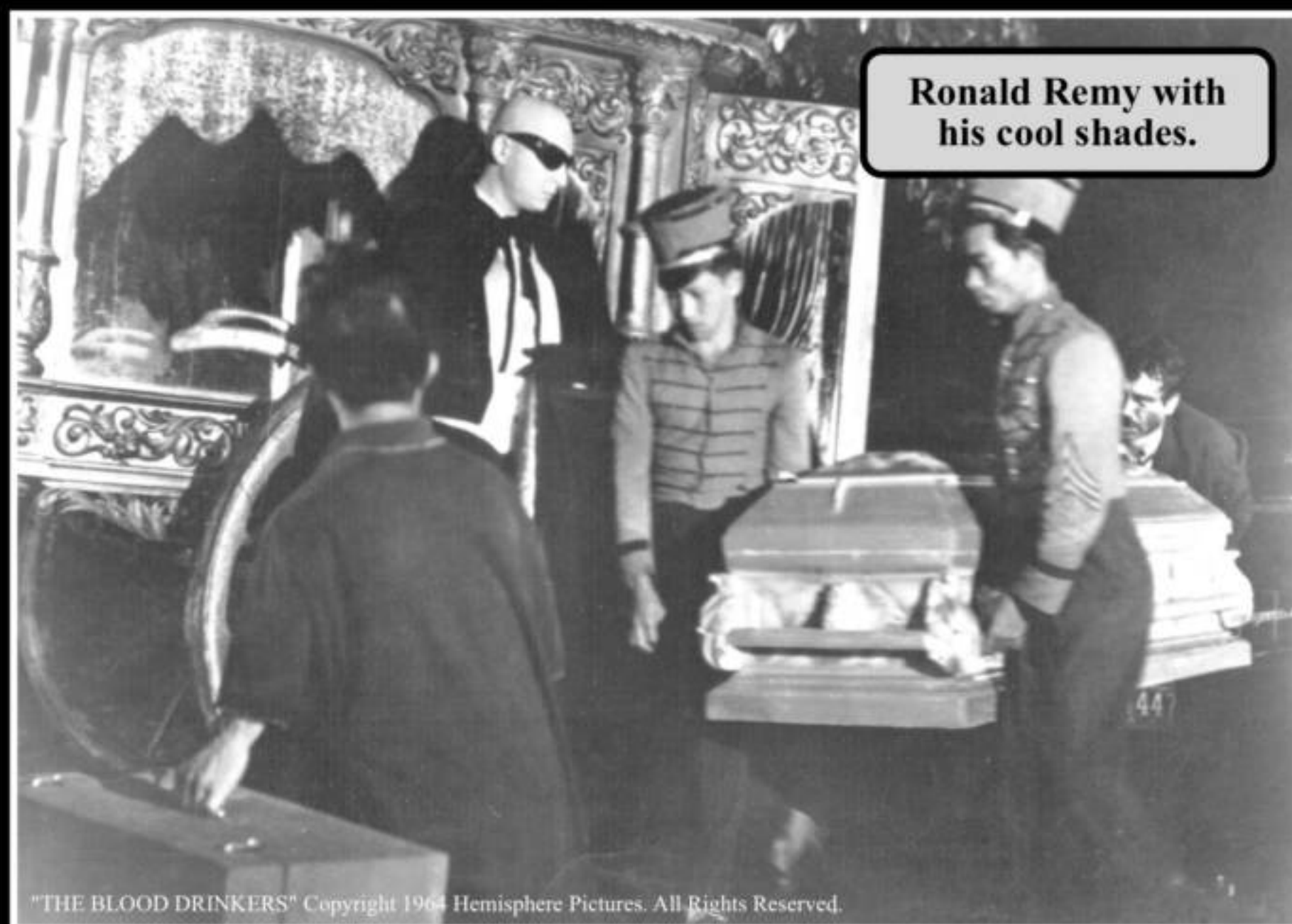
The film has the fascinating ability to occasionally confuse the viewer as to time and place, mixing modern imagery with things seemingly out of another time (most notably, the Spanish villa, an architectural relic from the colonial era). It establishes this tone from the first, opening with the horse-drawn hearse plodding along, being followed somewhat impatiently by a battleship of a Chrysler Imperial. Later, Fernandez arrives on the scene in a monstrous 1961 Chevy Impala convertible while the locals navigate their way through the unpaved rural roads in their horse and buggies.

In most respects Marco is your prototypical vampire; arrogant, condescending and sadistic, employing his bullwhip to beat his servants into submission (or to get his jollies, as when he gives Tanya a recreational whipping, to which she willingly submits). He also has mystical

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Dr. Marco and his sexy mistress, Tanya (Celia Rodriguez).



Ronald Remy with his cool shades.

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powers; the ability to impose his will on others, as well as the nifty power to disappear. Perhaps most in line with tradition, Marco seems to somehow convey an aristocratic heritage. He is doubtless a Spanish mestizo, and in that sense the character is an allusion to the country's colonial past, the mestizo master feeding on the native peasantry.

Ah, but then there is Marco's tender side. "I am in love with Katrina," he says at one point. "In all other matters I have risen above human feelings, but I must save Katrina." While more recent vampire cinema has tended to put a romantic spin on the subject, it was far from the norm in 1964. Marco may have been the first vampiric Don Juan, mooning over Katrina as he watches her waste away. Not that he lets his yearning for his true love interfere with his occasional sexual dalliances with Tanya, but then, Celia Rodriguez is fairly irresistible.

While the work follows certain standard horror formulas, it does beat its own path here and there. Keying on the genre's traditional preoccupation with deformity, the film not only enlists characters with physical abnormalities to populate Marco's entourage, but even the local parish priest played by Andres Benitez (whose dialogue and narration would be dubbed by well-known Filipino character actor Vic Diaz for the film's Western release) has a dumb, lame assistant, the implications of which are open to interpretation (the character's unintelligible sounds and grunts are identical to those of Marco's hunchbacked

henchman).

It is no surprise that in a nation as ardently Catholic as the Philippines, the film is in no way timid in its expression of faith. Unlike Western vampire cinema, with its generic religious symbolism, *Kulay Dugo ang Gabi* is not coy in the least regarding its Christian perspective. The film is replete with Catholic imagery, from Mary Walter's roomful of icons to the religious paraphernalia toted by the angry mob at the film's climax. "Against Satan we only have one weapon," says Benitez's priest. "That's Jesus Christ." There is even a moment wherein Marco and Katrina are cured briefly of their vampiric curse through

the power of the priest's prayers. Though the cure doesn't stick, it illustrates a theme that recurs in other works by de Leon in which even the most abhorrently evil can be redeemed by faith. It also allowed for an idyllic moment in which Marco and Katrina have a joyful, slow-motion frolic through a colorful, misty garden while celebrating their newfound freedom.

But the theme that seems most significant in the film is its apparent distaste – even loathing – for the family unit. Its significance to de Leon's artistic vision would become far more obvious in the director's follow-up vampire film two years later. In *Kulay Dugo* it is mentioned more than once that the vampire feeds on the blood of its own loved ones; for instance, when the ailing Katrina staggers out of her sepulcher to find

Marco and his misfits standing there gawking, she brushes Marco aside and instinctively lunges at the throat of her own mother.

Though touted in its home country as Philippine cinema's first color horror film, it was only partially in color owing to budget constrictions. But de Leon's ingenuity was at play even in this; the film's more ordinary moments rate the color footage while the supernatural or more atmospheric moments

were shot in black and white and tinted in pale reds and blues. The tinting – apparently annoying to some – actually succeeds in imbuing those moments with a strange, baleful quality that is well suited to the subject matter. Even in conditions of poverty the artist in de Leon was able to find expression, turning an obstacle into an asset. The film carries this theme over by



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**THE FIRST COLOR HORROR
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AMALIA FUENTES RONALD REMY
and **EDDIE FERNANDEZ**
IN
**KULAY DUGO
ANG GABI**
SERIALIZED IN HAWAGA KOMIKS
ALSO STARRING **EVA MONTES**
CELIA RODRIGUEZ IN A SPECIAL ROLE
RENATO ROBLES • MARY WALTER
PAQUITO • FELISA SALCEDO • CONCHITA CRUZ
ANDRES BENITEZ • TIVA LAVA • FEATURING MONA DEL CIELO
STORY: RICO BELLO DMAGAP SCREENPLAY: CESAR AMIGO MUSIC: TITO AREVALO DIRECTION: **GERRY DE LEON**

**ASHES TO ASHES... DUST TO DUST
IF THE WEREWOLVES DON'T GET YOU... THE
BLOOD DRINKERS MUST!**



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**THE
BLOOD
DRINKERS**

in
blood
curdling
color

with: **AMELIA FUENTES • RONALD REMY**
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Directed by **GERARDO de LEON**

the "BLOOD DRINKERS" begin



where
**DRACULA
FRANKENSTEIN
and the
WOLF-MAN
LEFT
OFF!**

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**THE
BLOOD
DRINKERS**

with: **AMELIA FUENTES • RONALD REMY**
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A HEMISPHERE PICTURE



**THE
BLOOD
DRINKERS**

in blood-curdling color

occasionally having the color footage awash in red gel to announce the presence or arrival of evil.

Two years after its release, *Kulay Dugo* would be picked up by New York-based Hemisphere Pictures for international distribution. While Hemisphere's principals were Irwin Pizor and Kane Lynn, the company grew out of the production partnership of Lynn and Filipino filmmaker Eddie Romero in the 1950s. Romero had begun his career under the tutelage of Gerardo de Leon, and when he and Lynn produced their first science fiction film in 1959 (*Terror is a Man*), Romero brought de Leon in to direct it. Though Hemisphere later tried to establish itself with WWII action/melodramas, a young associate named Sam Sherman convinced them that they would increase their returns considerably if they switched to the horror genre. Romero, who seemed partial to mimicking Hollywood programmers in his own films, again thought of de Leon when Lynn ran the horror idea past him.

After purchasing the rights to *Kulay Dugo* and dubbing it into English, Hemisphere gave it the more exploitable and forthright title *The Blood Drinkers*, with a gruesome ad campaign to match. Some have suggested that the somewhat odd flow of the narrative structure is down to the episodic nature of the source material, but it is worth mentioning that the film was also severely edited for its international release. The 2002 Image Entertainment DVD release of *Kulay Dugo* includes among its extras almost half-an-hour of footage deleted from the Hemisphere release. Philippine films tend to run overlong by Western standards – certainly by the standards of the exploitation and drive-in markets for which Hemisphere was aiming – and the excised footage

would have pushed the film up into the two-hour range, far too lengthy for its intended market. Unfortunately, the footage was never dubbed and includes no soundtrack, but what is perhaps most frustrating about the deleted scenes is the fact that they contain some of the film's more striking cinematography. Even so, there is plenty of impressive camerawork in the Hemisphere release print, from de Leon's excellent use of backlighting to the misty, cool, blue landscape, which somehow manages to make even the sweltering Philippine jungle look frigid.

While *The Blood Drinkers* was making its way through the drive-in circuit in the U.S. in 1966, de Leon got to work on another vampire film, *Ibulong mo sa Hangin* (*Whisper to the Wind*). Again the cast would be led by Amalia Fuentes; actually, it was Fuentes who produced the film with her company, A.M. Productions. The "A.M." stood for "Amalia Muhlach," Fuentes' real name. With a more focused narrative this time, de Leon used the film to more deeply explore concepts only hinted at in *Kulay Dugo*.

Set during the Spanish colonial era, the story uses the unfortunate Escudero family to depict the fading Spanish aristocracy as clinging to its station through inbreeding. Brother and sister Leonore (Fuentes) and Eduardo (Eddie Garcia) have been led to believe that their mother, Dona Consuelo (Mary Walter), is dead, but there is something unsettling going on within the household. Eduardo is the first to learn the horrible secret, but soon Leonore is hearing awful sounds at night and asking, "What's going on behind the wall in Papa's room?" Eduardo tries to dissuade her from pursuing an answer, but she too discovers the



An example of
de Leon's excellent
backlighting in
Blood Drinkers.

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truth. It turns out that Dona Consuelo is not completely dead, but rather *undead* and being kept chained by family patriarch Don Enrique Escudero (Johnny Monteiro) in a secret chamber beneath the house. Although Don Enrique warns Eduardo to stay away from his mother, Eduardo is drawn to her and sneaks down into the secret chamber, allowing her to feed on his blood. Don Enrique is eventually compelled to kill his wife (with help from a loyal, mute servant), but he soon after succumbs to a heart attack upon discovering that Eduardo has already been afflicted with the shameful family curse.

Fearing that the entire family would be gripped by this degrading malady, Don Enrique had made an addendum to his will, decreeing that upon his death the Villa Escudero be burned to the ground. He had further forbid his daughter from marrying her beau, Daniel (Romeo Vasquez), or anyone else, in an attempt to isolate the family from the outside world. After the death of his father, Eduardo seeks to circumvent the will and sets his sights on vampirizing his sister. The film really leaves no room for doubt regarding its particular conception of vampirism. After managing to kill Daniel, Eduardo makes his play for his sister, prompting the following exchange:

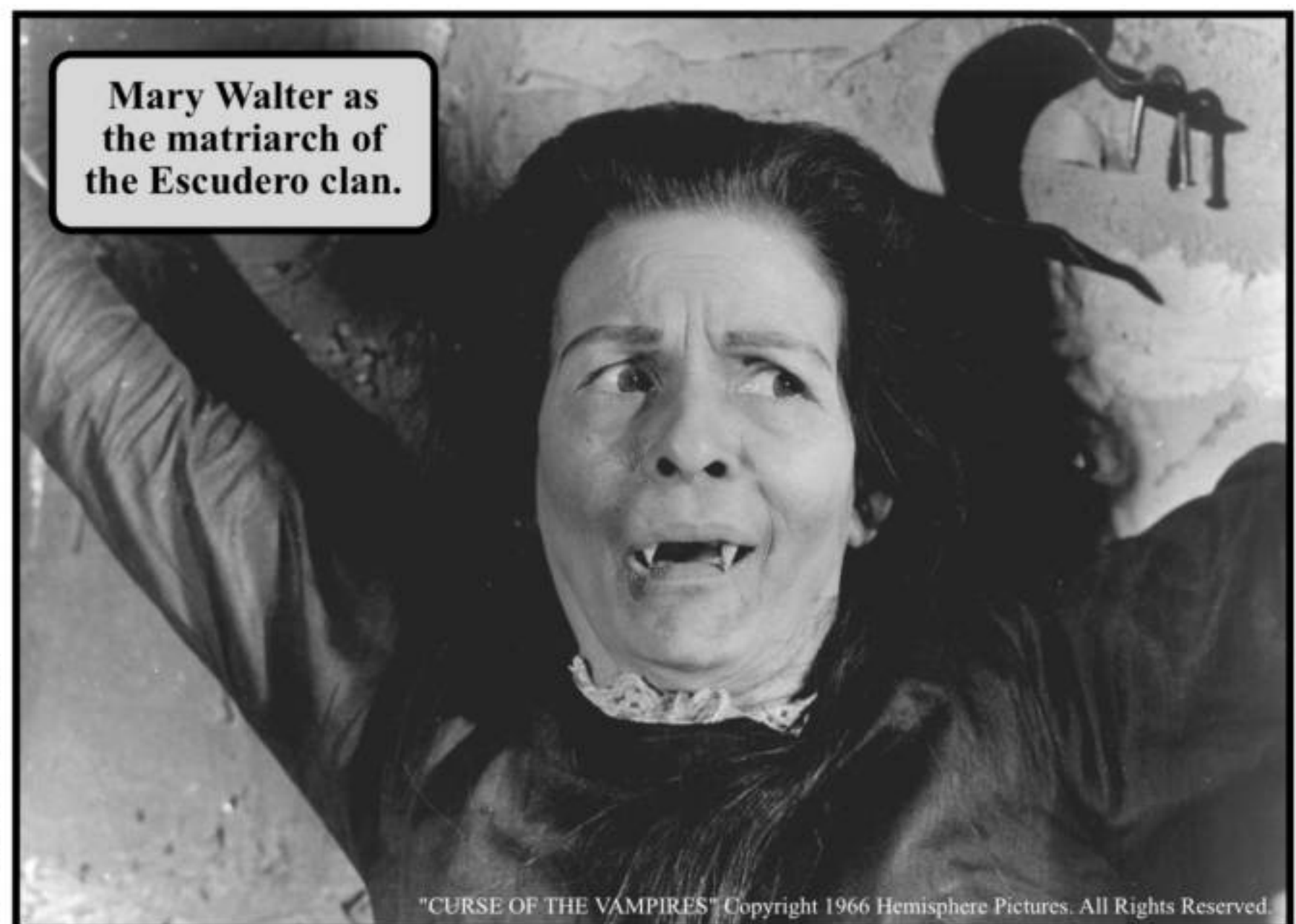
Leonore: Why are you looking at me like that?

Eduardo: You're lovely, Leonore. So lovely.

Leonore: Eduardo, I'm your sister! Have you taken leave of your senses? I'm your sister!

Eduardo: My beautiful, beautiful sister. Leonore; your lovely hair; your eyes; your neck.

More than any film of its era, *Ibulong mo sa Hangin* took the sexual subtext beneath the surface of vampire mythology and brought it to the forefront, giving it as perverse a rendering one could have expected for that time. In the end, Eduardo



Mary Walter as the matriarch of the Escudero clan.

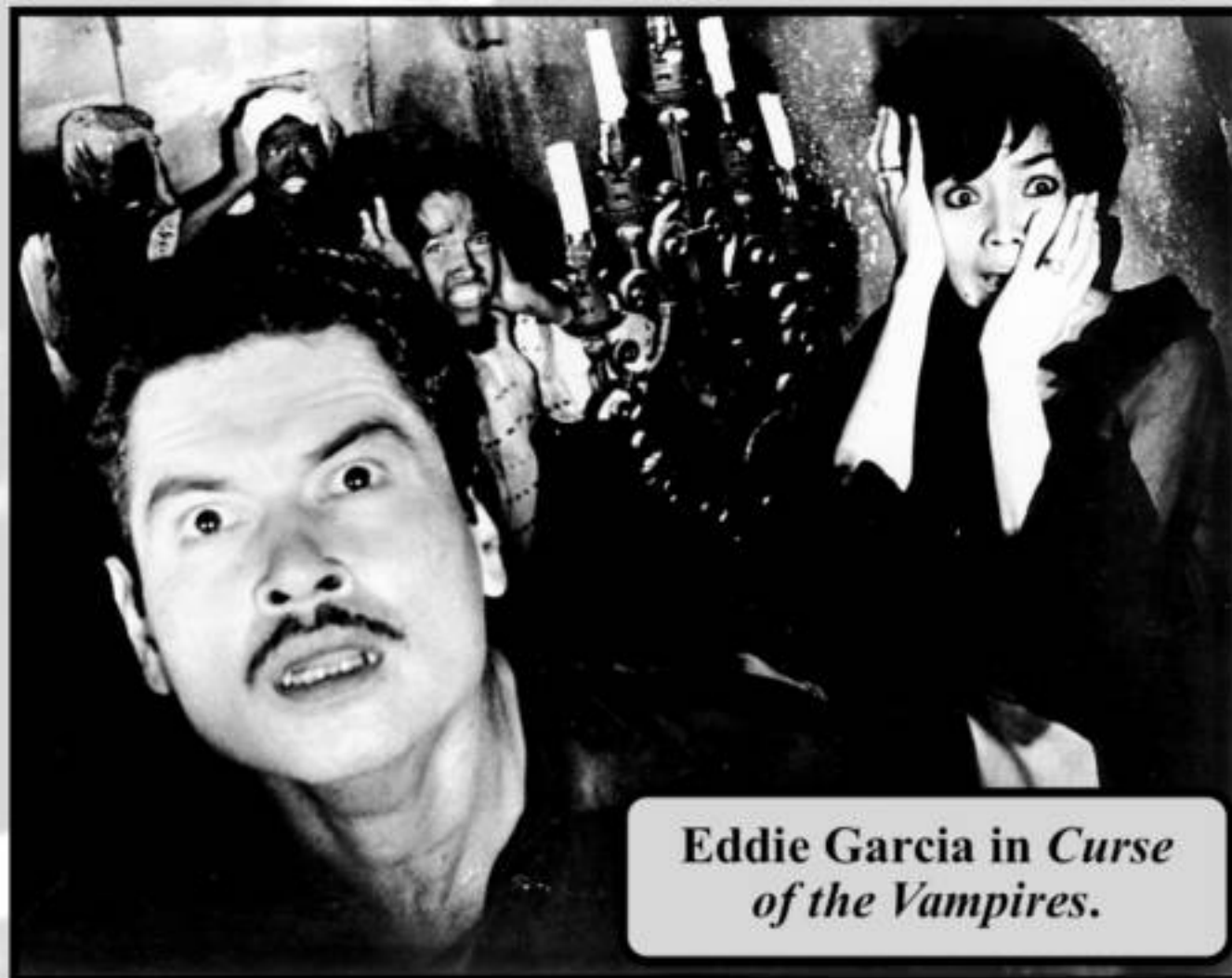
"CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES" Copyright 1966 Hemisphere Pictures. All Rights Reserved.

succeeds in vampirizing the household (his sister, his new bride, and three servant girls), but Leonore is rescued by the arrival of Daniel's ghost, which stakes her as the angry village mob sets the house ablaze. Eduardo and his women flee to the basement where they are trapped and perish while cringing at the sound of the prayers of the local priest (Andres Benitez again). The arrival of the mob is quite something to behold, a procession of nuns and villagers pulling platforms containing large religious icons, looking like some sort of Catholic holiday parade. De Leon intercuts close-ups of the serene faces of the icons with shots of the vampires agonizing; somehow, those icons manage to out-creep the vampires, coming off as the most disturbing images in the film, rivaled only by the distorted sounds of the prayers of Benitez's priest.

While the film is generally well acted, some of the performances are a tad hammy (Fuentes, for instance). The film's best turn by far is Walter's portrayal of the ghastly family matriarch. Never speaking, but offering her share of desperate shrieks and cries, her face is a constant composite of derangement and torment, conveyed very convincingly. There is also the very unsettling moment when she stands before her son, Garcia, looking at him with what can only be described as a combination of glee and lust. She recoils at the sight of the crucifix hanging from Garcia's neck, and when he realizes it, he rips it off and casts it aside. Utterly depraved and tragic, de Leon certainly created what remains one of the most fascinating and disturbing entries in the vampire genre.

One thing that must be mentioned is the use of blackface on the actors portraying the household servants. It was probably politically incorrect even by Western standards of its own time, and looks even more absurd now. One has no choice but to contemplate its purpose, and anyone familiar with de Leon's work would know that there was certainly a point at play. An artist as thoughtful as Gerardo de Leon would not be throwing such things into his films arbitrarily. As the story is set in the Spanish colonial era, it would seem that the blackface was meant to portray the caste prejudice in place in the Philippines at that time; Spaniards and Spanish mestizos were at the top, while the darker skinned Malays found themselves at the bottom rung of the ladder. The basic principal was, the darker the skin, the lower one's station in society, as with most Eurocentric cultures. Nonetheless, the burlesque nature of it remains the film's biggest obstacle by far. The caricature is made even more extreme by the fact that these blackface servants sleep while kneeling at the bedside of their masters.

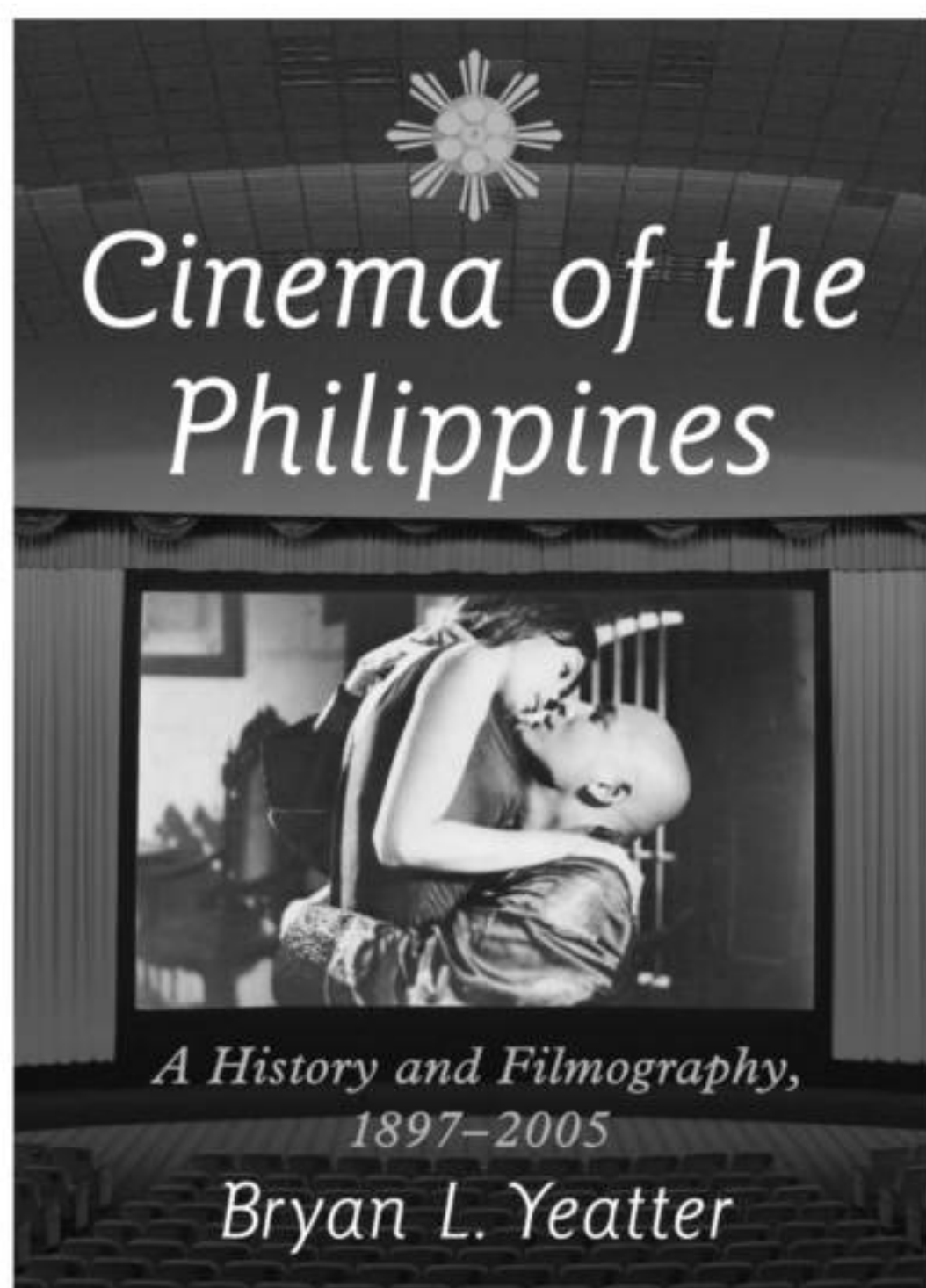
Ibulong mo sa Hangin was eventually picked up by Hemisphere in 1970, dubbed into English and retitled *Curse of the Vampires* to serve as the bottom half of a double bill with *Beast of Blood*, the final entry in the Blood Island trilogy. Only one more of de Leon's films would see wide release in Western markets, 1971's *Women in Cages*, a nasty piece of work that hitched onto the Filipino women-in-prison wagon that took off after Jack Hill's *The Big Doll House* had made a big splash. It was Roger Corman's New World Pictures that distributed *Women in Cages*, so it needs to be repeated:



Eddie Garcia in *Curse of the Vampires*.

it was mainly U.S. exploitation distributors who gave us all that most will ever see of de Leon's work. And for that, some of us are grateful.

Shadowland readers! Be sure to check out Bryan L. Yeatter's book, Cinema in the Philippines: A History and Filmography 1897-2005. Copies can be ordered online at www.mcfarlandpub.com or by mail via the order form on the following page.



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Although Filipino cinema dates to the early silent era and shares many characteristics with Western film, it has been frequently ignored by Western critics and audiences. This book offers a rare study of cinema in the Philippines. The first half of the work presents the little-known history of Filipino cinema. Arranged chronologically, chapters cover lost pre-World War II films, the postwar cinema boom, the Philippines' unique relationship with the United States and its manifestation on film, and Filipino cinema's current decline. The second half of the book is the most comprehensive published filmography of Filipino cinema to date.

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SUPERNATURAL SEVENTIES

A GUIDE TO TELEVISION'S BEST HORROR MOVIES

PART I

By Lucy Hall Kelly

Films produced specifically for television had been around since the 1950's, however the term "TV movie" wasn't officially coined until the early 1960's. The purpose of marketing films for television derived from networks wishing to increase their audience, and advertising, by cutting into the theater market. Major stations began airing made for television films weekly, thus giving birth to "the movie of the week."

The elements involved in the creation of television films were very basic in the beginning. These consisted of limited budgets, production quality, and special effects, compared to that of Hollywood films. This meant limited range for settings, camera setups, smaller casts, and crews. Regardless of lower production values, television films provided their own appeal due to original plots and casting major stars. In addition, these films relied less on shocking gore and more on atmosphere, suggestion, and slowly building the plot. In order to meet television censor standards, films were produced without gratuitous sex or violence.

During the 1970's, television networks made their own significant contribution to horror film history. As television movies progressed into the decade, several were made with horror themes concerning the supernatural. These included cult classics such as *Salem's Lot* and *Trilogy of Terror*. Theatrical horror films of the era consisted of occultism, haunted houses, and evil children; these themes spilled over into television due to the success of major studio productions like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), *Carrie* (1976), and *The Amityville Horror* (1979).

Director/producer, Dan Curtis, created supernatural films and shows for television throughout the 1960's and 1970's. He became most recognizable for his famous TV series, *Dark Shadows*, and *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*. His films include *The Intruders*, *The Night Strangler*, *Burnt Offerings* (one of his few

theatrical outings), *Trilogy of Terror*, *The Norliss Tapes*, *Curse of the Black Widow*, *Dead of Night*, and *Scream of the Wolf*.

In addition, Curtis developed adaptations of horror novels, *Dracula*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Turn of the Screw* for television. He had an incredible partnership with sci-fi/horror writer Richard Matheson to bring these amazing stories to audiences. Many of Curtis' films appear in this guide as a result of having well developed storylines, performances, and outstanding production quality.

SUMMER OF FEAR (1978) (also released as *Stranger in Our House*)

Rachel Bryant is a typical teenager who has it all, a loving family, a boyfriend, a best friend, and a horse. However, her idyllic life is disrupted when a tragic accident kills her aunt, uncle, and their maid. Cousin Julia survives and moves to the Bryant family home. Julia initially appears shy and awkward but Rachel takes Julia under her wing. Rachel introduces her cousin to friends and encourages her to become more outgoing. While time passes, Julia appears to reinvent herself, seducing, and luring away everyone associated with Rachel. Julia is not what she seems and disturbing events begin to take place.





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Rachel's suspicions escalate upon finding macabre items, leading her to believe Julia is practicing black magic. Rachel becomes an outcast in her family by speaking out against Julia. No one believes her accusations, therefore she seeks assistance from neighbor Professor Jarvis, an occult expert.

Will Rachel be able to expose the true Julia? Is Julia using the dark arts to steal Rachel's boyfriend, her father, and her new party dress? How will Rachel combat this demonic force?

Summer of Fear was directed by horror master, Wes Craven and was based on Louis Duncan's young adult novel by the same name. It is a fairly faithful adaption of the teen thriller. There are few variations, including added sexuality not found in the teen-targeted book.

Linda Blair stars in her second leading horror role following *The Exorcist*. It was Craven's third film after *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). Craven makes use of dream sequences in this early outing; his apparent flare for dream themes is evidenced in many of his later films, which include the *Elm Street* series. Craven went on to direct several television horrors in the 1980's as well, including *Deadly Blessing* (1981), *Invitation to Hell* (1984), and *Chiller* (1985).

Viewers are drawn in by the pace of



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Originally known as *Stranger in Our House* (airing on Halloween 1978), Craven's film was re-titled *Summer of Fear* and went to theaters in Europe.

direction and suspense regarding Rachel's suspicions. Craven delivers a suspenseful climax with an unexpected twist. The film was cast with idealistic teen actors for the era, with signature 1970's fashion and big frizzy hair. Lee Purcell was believable as bad girl, Julia. Blair's role was identifiable, as viewers suffer along with her struggle to uncover the truth. A young Fran Drescher is appealing as Rachel's best friend. Jeff East who played a young Clark Kent in *Superman* (1978), also provides a well done performance.

The chilling tone was predominately set by Julia, including her icy stares, spiteful tone, wicked grins, and makeup effects. Julia's appearance consisted of a crazy hairdo, evil eyes, and red smoke as her true powers manifest. A pair of demonic eyes are seen at the beginning of the film and at the climax.

During Rachel's investigation of Julia, she uncovers odd objects. Rachel finds a human tooth, burnt horse mane, and a red spotted photo of herself. Rachel later develops a severe rash, preventing her from attending the school dance with her boyfriend. Julia is also unable to be photographed, leading viewers to believe she may be a vampire.

Vulgar scenes include Rachel's dad's (Julia's uncle) over the top flirting, implying a possible affair with Julia. Rachel's brother lusts for Julia, suggesting possible incest. And Julia takes her cousin's seconds, when she steals Rachel's boyfriend.

Viewers are treated to a climax of smash-up car crashes, and a long awaited, devilish, cousin catfight.

THE INITIATION OF SARAH (1978)

The Initiation of Sarah is a revenge story similar to *Carrie*, however, the characters are attending college instead of high school and the film is a bit of a morality tale.

The central character, Sarah Goodwin, is a withdrawn girl with bewitching powers. She is admitted to an unpopular sorority, "PED." Her outgoing sister, Patty, gets accepted into the renowned snobby sorority, "ANS." Patty is forced to cast Sarah away by the queen bee, Jennifer Lawrence, and is scorned by the other snobbish girls. Sarah is later manipulated by the wicked housemother, Erica Hunter, who harbors dark powers. Hunter uses Sarah's deadly abilities against the rival sorority, specifically targeting Jennifer.

Will the girls survive hell week or their sorority initiations? Will Sarah succumb to using her powers for evil?

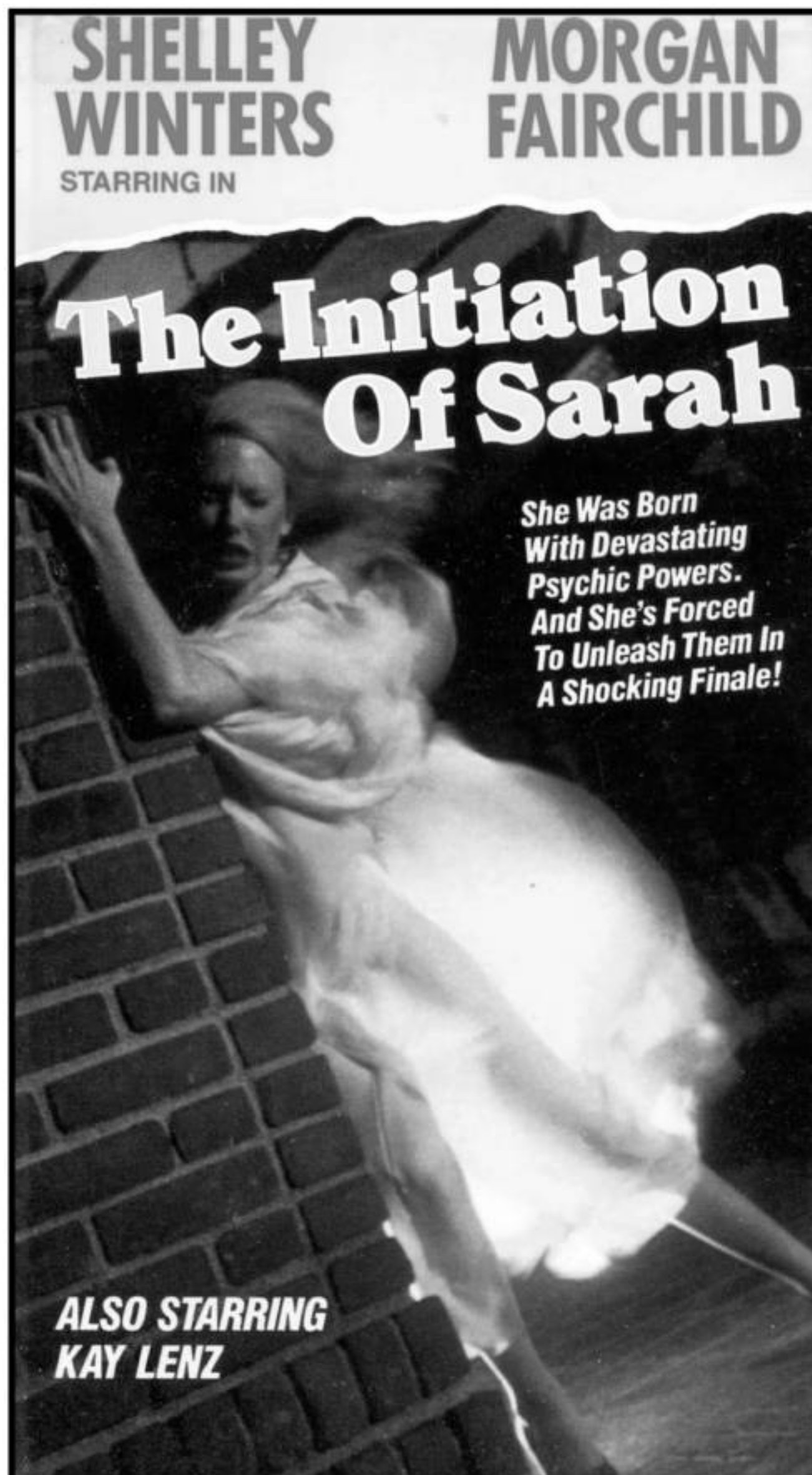
Television director, Robert Day, builds a slow tensioned plot at a decent pace, and then delivers a turbulent conclusion. The archetype portrayals are

timeless, consisting of the beautiful villain aching for punishment, versus the outcast heroine, who only wishes to be left alone. The casting is idealistic with a handful of young future stars. Morgan Fairchild reprises her role as the eternal bitchy villain. A pre-*Airplane!* Robert Hays is a frat guy. Morgan Brittany is the suffering sister, and Tisa Farrow is the timid Mouse. Shelley Winters portrays the malevolent housemother, whose sinister motives result in a tragic finale. Kay Lenz delivers a sympathetic portrayal of shy Sarah.

These components are combined with a gloomy atmosphere, including a peculiar labyrinth in the back yard of PED. Chilling scenes include the girls attending a beach party while Sarah has apprehension about starting college. She fears drifting apart, but Patty eases her fears by assuring her that it will not happen. A boy invites Patty to go swimming and attempts to kiss her, Sarah cries out for him to stop. The boy falls backwards into the water by force of Sarah's psychic ability.

Later, Sarah is verbally assaulted by ANS – who force Patty to join in the antics. Patty, out of fear of being blackballed by ANS, complies. Patty references PED initials by shouting, "I will not associate with pigs, elephants, and dogs anywhere." As a result of ANS' cruelty, Sarah's feelings are hurt, and she storms off in tears. Patty follows after her, and Sarah uses her abilities to nearly drop a piano on her sister, which is being lifted into a dorm window.

Jennifer insists on teasing Mouse, which results in a confrontation with Sarah. Using ESP, Sarah forces Jennifer into a water fountain, and humiliates her in front of her peers.



A *Carrie*-inspired scene consisted of Sarah being fooled into attending a fake party. Jennifer sets Sarah up to be pelted with garbage by ANS and humiliates her. Jennifer is later locked in the shower with scalding water.

The sororities participate in ritual hell week and initiation ceremonies. However, these activities have not taken place at PED in twenty years, due the tragic death of an earlier member. ANS holds their harmless ceremony, while PED conducts a satanic ritual with human sacrifice in the labyrinth. Several students are disfigured leading up to the film's climax.



"DEAD OF NIGHT" Copyright 1977 Dan Curtis Productions. All Rights Reserved.

DEAD OF NIGHT (1977)

Mirroring *Trilogy of Terror*, this anthology features three unrelated tales of the supernatural. Two of the tales are less effective and forgettable, but the finale segment is disturbingly haunting and makes for worthwhile viewing.

Second Chance is a story about Frank, a fanatic for vintage automobiles who restores an antique car. While taking it for a cruise on some backwoods roads, Frank transports to the year the vehicle was manufactured – 1926! After arriving in the time warp, his car is stolen. The incident leads to unexpected results, changing both the thief and Frank's fate. The tale is not horror, but a science fiction story in the tradition of *The Twilight Zone*.

The second segment, *There's No Such Thing as a Vampire*, features a possible vampire, Alexis Gheria. Preceding the discovery of bite marks on his wife's neck, Dr. Gheria attempts to solve the mystery. He is a skeptic surrounded by superstitious servants and is forced to call upon his colleagues for help. The phenomenon results in a surprisingly deadly twist. Has Alexis succumbed to vampirism, and will Dr. Gheria uncover the real cause of his wife's sudden illness? This story is less frightening and reminiscent of a Hitchcock-

style mystery.

The finale feature, *Bobby*, tells of a grieving mother whose child accidentally drowned. The desperate parent uses black magic to resurrect her son, Bobby. However, she discovers her child has changed. The resurrected Bobby now wants to play a deadly game of hide and seek with his mother. Ultimately, the traumatized mother reaps terrifying results for her efforts to regain her lost child as the sweet, innocent Bobby, turns to hellish-tormenter before her bewildered eyes. The dark, stormy night adds to the tension and terror. As the thunder roars and the electricity goes out the suspense is heighten, leading us to hear a child's voice saying, "Mommy, Mommy come and get me, you can't find me Mommy...ha ha ha...I'm going to find you, MOMMY!"

This anthology contains a musical score by Robert Cobert, while Dan Curtis, like in *Trilogy of Terror*, uses sweeping camera movements and a creepy opening.

The first two tales pale in comparison to the last, and without it the film may have been forgotten. Even so, impressive performances and atmosphere will keep audiences intrigued. *Dead of Night* has a great cast including Ed Begley Jr., whose performance is endearing in the first tale. Patrick Macnee and Anjanette Comer are adequately cast in the second short. In *Bobby* Joan Hackett is the unstable mother and Lee Montgomery is

the evil child. Montgomery's performance is ideal as the sweet-faced Bobby; his vulnerability is believable and the twist ending will shock viewers. Special effects and suspenseful moments in this tale guarantees viewers will be jumping out of their seats.

THE NORLISS TAPES (1973)

Investigative writer, David Norliss is declared missing prior to the submission of an anticipated manuscript concerning the supernatural. The mysterious disappearance leads his worried publisher to search for clues.





Recorded auto tapes are discovered in Norliss' deserted home. Upon listening to the tapes, a tale of occult magic, vampirism, demons, and the walking dead unravels.

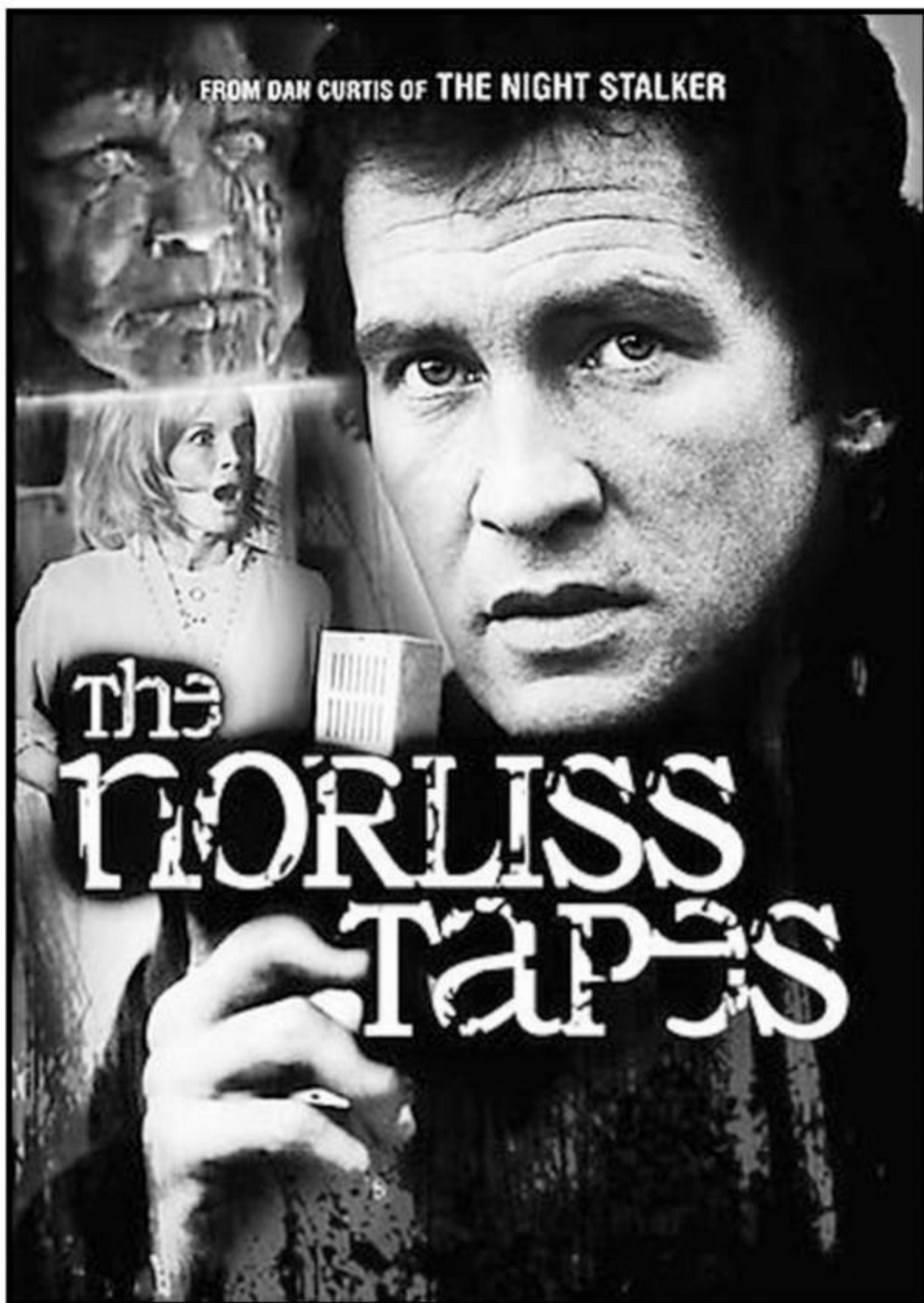
A wealthy widow, Ellen Court, insists that her dead husband, James Court, has come back to claim her life. The police laugh off the allegations. Ellen is left with no choice but to seek help from a private investigator. She hires Norliss, who is skeptical, until he discovers an empty coffin. Grisly murders follow and the victims are found drained of blood. Norliss realizes to his dismay that the occurrences are real, and not a hoax. A mysterious, uncertain ending leaves the audience dangling.

The film compels from the beginning to end by way of an intelligent script by William F. Nolan. It is atmospherically driven with a sinister setting of rain, mist, fog, and wind-swept locales. An eerie music score was handled by Robert Cobert and the film's cinematography is impeccably paced.

Roy Thinnes as Norliss and Angie Dickinson as the widow, give genuine intense performances. These two central characters are sustained by a great supporting cast. Claude Akins revisits his eternal role as a stubborn sheriff. Don Porter is Norliss' concerned publisher. Vonette McGhee is intriguing as the occult store owner. An exceptional performance is given by Nick Dimitri, who is terrifying as the murderous, gray skinned, yellow-eyed ghoul.

Standout scenes include eruptions of violence by a super strong Court. He initially attacks Ellen in his art studio. Ellen's dog hears noises and awakens her. She is led by the dog to investigate, carrying a shotgun. She is forced to shoot at Court after he tosses around the dog, snapping it in half like a twig.

In another action-packed scene Court chases Norliss and Ellen, then rips off their car door. Later, Ellen's sister draws back drapes in a motel room to reveal Court's hideous face staring back at her. Shortly after, Court hides in the backseat of a young girl's car before viciously attacking.

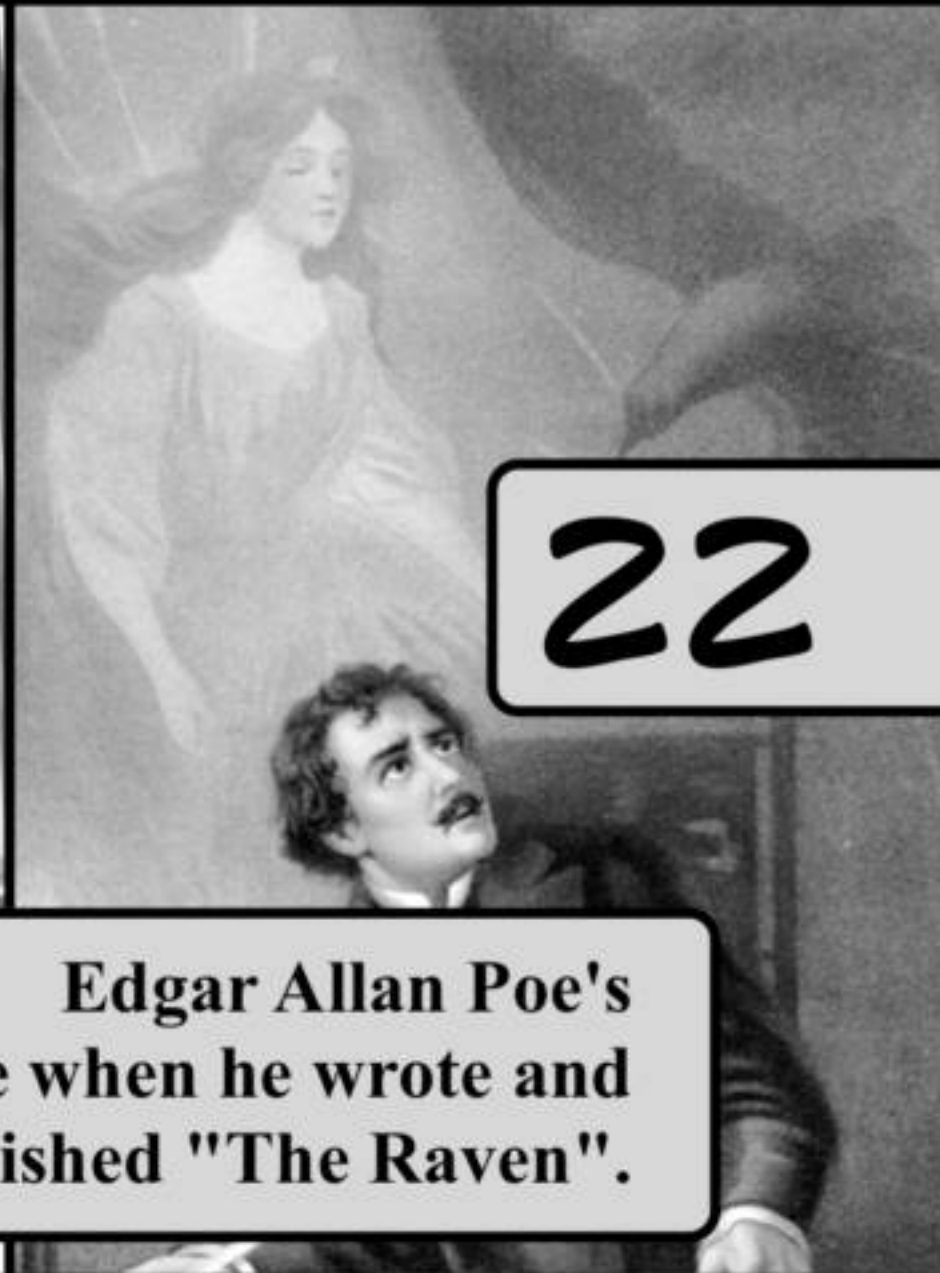


Be back here next issue for Part 2 of the Supernatural Seventies!

BY THE NUMBERS

5

Points of articulation that the very first Wolverine action figure had (from 1984's *Secret Wars* toy line).



22

Episodes produced of *The Flash* television series.

36

Edgar Allan Poe's age when he wrote and published "The Raven".



635

Dollars that a complete (with box) 1979 18" Kenner Alien figure recently sold for on eBay.



1913

Year that Filipino director, Gerardo de Leon was born.



300,000

Estimated dollar budget for Don Coscarelli's *Phantasm* (1979).

BEYOND FANTASTIQUE!

[bee-ond: outside the understanding, limits, or reach of; past: beyond comprehension.]

[fan-tas-teek: a French term for a cinematic or literary genre encompassing horror, science fiction and fantasy.]

CINEMA:

DAIMAJIN: TRIPLE FEATURE COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Daiei; 1966, Running Time: 240 Min., Format: Blu-Ray;
2-Disc Set; Mill Creek Entertainment.

THE HIDEOUS IDOL RETURNS

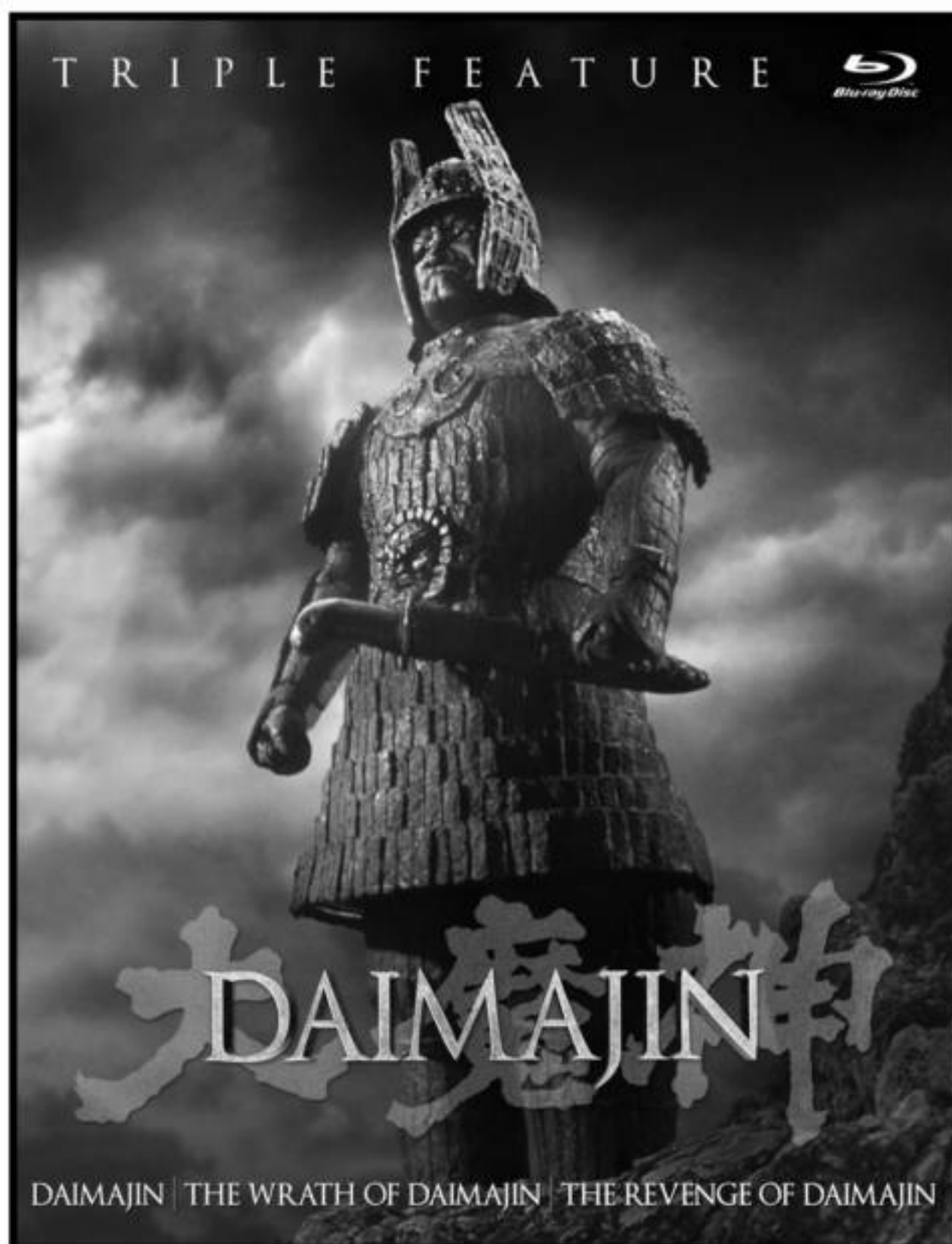
The 1960s were a great time for Japanese daikaiju (giant monster) cinema. Toho produced a string of Godzilla films, along with countless non Big-G related entries to the genre (*Dagora*, the *Space Monster* never gets the respect it deserves), while smaller studios like Shochiku and Nikkatsu released *The X From Outer Space* and *Gappa: The Triphibian Monster*, respectively. And who could forget Daiei Studios' giant city-stomping turtle, Gamera?

Daiei was something of an oddity, on one hand they produced the Oscar-winning *Rashomon*, directed by Akira Kurosawa, and the critically acclaimed *Zatoichi* series but had been notorious for their low budget Gamera films. Clearly the studio thought highly of samurai dramas, but decided that giant monster pictures, which were aimed at kids, could be produced on the cheap. Regardless, it was an excellent business strategy, as the Gamera films earned Daiei modest returns, though nowhere near the profits that Godzilla was bringing to Toho.

Fortunately, not all kaiju are created equal, and Daiei bestowed the *Daimajin* trilogy with a higher regard and more substantial budget than the typical Gamera outing. *Daimajin* merged the samurai 'period dramas' with the likes of a rampaging giant monster and the results were unique, to say the least. Coupled with truly remarkable cinematography and some of the best special effects of their time, the series remains a startling testimony to just how amazing a giant monster film could be.

The plot of each movie in the trilogy is similar, taking place during Japan's feudal era: a ruthless tyrant has usurped power over the land and spreads his cruelty among the commoners. The masses are condemned to slave labor, with their only savior being a giant stone statue, heralded as a vengeful god that comes to life in times of need. There is no direct continuity between the three films, save for Daimajin and his role as a revered god.

Those expecting non-stop giant monster action will be disappointed. Daimajin's scenes are relegated to the climax of each film – and while that would spell doom for the typical Godzilla or Gamera adventure, it works wonders for this trilogy. It never feels like we're simply waiting for the monster's rampage, thanks



in part to intriguing stories and samurai action. When Daimajin does arrive, it's nothing short of awe-inspiring. Pitting an army of samurai against a giant stone god makes for great viewing; instead of the typical scenario featuring tanks and jet fighters lobbing heavy artillery at your average radioactive gargantuan, Daimajin is faced with the primitive, yet inventive, weapons of the feudal period. Further, his god-like powers offer a supernatural edge nearly unseen in the run-of-the-mill kaiju film (keep an eye out for a scene in *Return of Daimajin* that's reminiscent of Charlton Heston's turn as Moses in *The Ten Commandments* when he parts the Red Sea).

The *Daimajin* trilogy had previously been available on DVD from ADV Films several years ago. That set has since gone out of print and Image Entertainment released two of the three films on DVD in 2007. The previous releases were notable in their own rights, but nothing compares to the latest Blu-Ray release by Mill Creek Entertainment. *Daimajin*, *Return of Daimajin*, and *Daimajin Strikes Again* have never looked better, all featured in 2.35:1 anamorphic widescreen and with such vivid colors and crisp picture definition that it's like watching the films for the first time. I'm usually wary about viewing older kaiju films in high definition, since it sometimes exposes the limitations of the special effects but, much to my

THE HIDEOUS IDOL MAJIN

COLOR
&
SCOPE

THE
VENGEANCE
OF THE
MONSTER

SEE THE HORROR OF A VILLAGE
CRUSHED BY THE REVENGE OF HELL

surprise, this was a non-issue with *Daimajin*. Even on a 1080p 45" flat-screen TV, there wasn't a single moment that deterred my enjoyment. On top of it all, Mill Creek has included subtitles and English dubs for each of the films (always great to have both options, in my opinion), the original Japanese theatrical trailers, and a lengthy interview with cinematographer Fujio Morita.

Looking back, it's extraordinary to think that all three of the *Daimajin* films were made in 1966. It says something about how, nowadays, it takes several years for studios to turn out often inferior sequels. For those on the fence about upgrading their older *Daimajin* DVDs to Blu-Ray, this is the way to go. And for those who never had the privilege of seeing these films before, now is your chance to view the trilogy in the best format available thus far. *Daimajin* set a standard for 'art house' quality daikaiju films that has never been equaled; now, through Mill Creek's efforts, the series gets the respect it deserves, fitting of a giant vengeful god.

Reviewed by Chad Hauser

HOUSE OF THE WOLF MAN

My Way Pictures; 2009, Running Time: 75 Min., Dir: Eben McGarr, Writer: Eben McGarr; Cast: Ron Chaney, Michael R. Thomas, Cheryl Rodes.

HOME IS WHERE THE HOWL IS

Every so often there comes along a film that's truly a challenge to review. *House of the Wolf Man* is one such film, in fact, it may hold the honor of being the *most* difficult one I've ever had to review. First and foremost, those not acquainted with the classic Universal Monsters films of the 1930s and '40s will find little of interest here. It's for the true fans of those timeless horror pictures that *House of the Wolf Man* will draw the most attention (and, for some, the most ire).

Following the monster mash-up formula of *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945), *House of the Wolf Man* tells the story of five people who are invited to the remote castle of Dr. Bela Reinhardt (Ron Chaney). It turns out that one of these seemingly unrelated individuals is in line to inherit the estate – but why? What is there connection to the mysterious doctor? And moreover, how will they be chosen? Mysteries abound and monstrous secrets are revealed as it becomes clear that not all is as it seems in Reinhardt's castle.

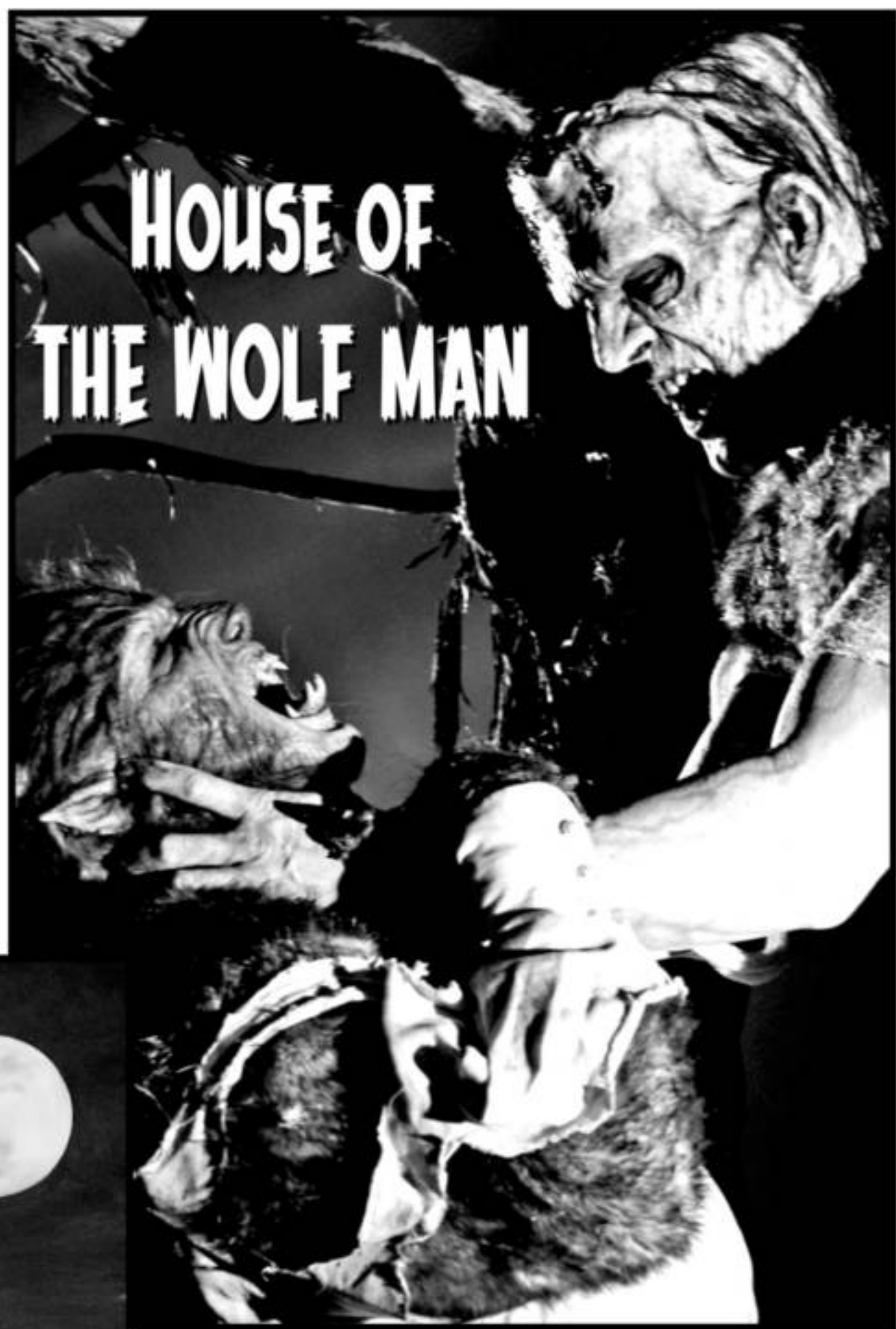
The above description sounds rather distant from what one might expect of the standard Universal Monster film. And make no mistake, it is. The film's premise is generally simplistic and the first hour plays out like the Poverty Row mystery pictures of the '30s and '40s. Shades of *One Frightened Night* (1935) and *Murder by*



Invitation (1941) seep through as Reinhardt's castle is teeming with medieval décor, portraits with wandering eyes, and Barlow – a gruesome butler. This is all well and good, but for a movie titled and marketed as *House of the Wolf Man*, where's our monsters?

The difficulty of writing this review is that I fear mentioning too much, as well as avoiding potential spoilers. Regardless, there's no getting around the fact that the monsters are no-shows until the last fifteen minutes of the film. It's a shame because the monster makeup in *House of the Wolf Man* is astounding. The Wolf Man never looked fiercer; Frankenstein's monster is a marvel to behold and Michael R. Thomas is superb as Bela Lugosi's Dracula. We're also treated to a spectacular fight scene between the Wolf Man and Frankenstein's monster. The all-out brawl is very well staged and easily trumps the climax of *Frankenstein meets the Wolf Man* (1943).

While the prior *House of* movies didn't lob all the monsters in during one particular scene, Universal also never tried to cram them in at the last second as if they were just an afterthought, either. Whatever possessed the filmmakers of *House of the Wolf Man* to



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barely utilize their monsters is a mystery.

Unfortunately, the scenes without the monstrous icons have a tendency to drag. While the overall plot is serviceable, the script is very problematic and the acting leaves much to be desired. On the screenplay front, it seemed like it never graduated from the first or second draft stage without any further polishing. Too much unnecessary dialogue hinders the pace and a basic tenet of screenwriting is to always 'show' instead of tell – something *House of the Wolf Man* really suffers from. It doesn't help that the dialogue tends to be wooden and the acting is not really up-to-par. Ron Chaney (Lon Chaney Jr.'s grandson) is very over-the-top in his performance, and many of the other actors follow suit.

On the positive side, the filmmakers nailed the 1940s style camera angles, cinematography and 'look' of the Universal Monster films. The set design is phenomenal and *House of the Wolf Man* was shot in black and white – a huge plus. Bonus points go to the impressive filtering effect used to make the film appear aged – not in the degraded 'Grindhouse' sense, but a softening filter was utilized to make the movie look older. This might not be noticeable to some viewers, but those who are familiar with video production

may pick up on the post-production effect.

At the end of the day, *House of the Wolf Man* is a love letter to fans of the genre and it's obvious that a lot of heart went into making it. Sadly, there's no denying its many imperfections. Despite these criticisms, I simply can't flat-out dislike the film; there's a charm to the movie even if it's exclusive to certain viewers. I would like to see a follow-up, as the ending certainly seems to be left open for one. Next time, hopefully more screen time would be given to the monsters, along with adding a new screenwriter to the mix (or more script revisions). The last fifteen minutes of *House of the Wolf Man* stand as a reminder to what could have been, proving that the potential *was* there. Beneath all of the problems, I own it on DVD and I don't regret the purchase. At the very least, I'm delighted that there are people out there who still love and adore those Universal Monster films enough to funnel their creative energies into getting a project like this off the ground.

Reviewed by Stan Fuller

THE SHADOW KNOWS

2012, Running Time: 120 Min., Dir: Robby Reed,
Writer: Robby Reed; Cast: Walter Gibson, Orson
Welles, Alec Baldwin.



THE WEED OF CRIME BEARS BITTER FRUIT

The Shadow's been lurking in the darkness for the better part of eighty years, mesmerizing those who

read, listened, or watched his thrilling exploits. Regrettably, his status and popularity have since been relegated to the shadows – but the dark avenger himself has never been forgotten. *The Shadow Knows* is an informative documentary that can attest to the character's impressive mythology along with his humble origins.

Clocking in at two hours, *The Shadow Knows* is separated into ten comprehensive chapters, each one focusing on a particular aspect of the Shadow's storied history. Everything is covered, ranging from the Shadow's creation to his appearances on radio, television, films, his legacy in pulp novels and comic books – even toys – not a stone is left unturned. Of course, the 1994 Alec Baldwin flick is also discussed to great extent. Rare photos and artwork are displayed and the Shadow's influence on the creation of Batman is touched upon as well.

It's no exaggeration to say that every second of *The Shadow Knows* is crammed with fascinating information; those with a firm knowledge of the character will *still* undoubtedly find much to learn here. The presentation is marvelous in every respect and I can't see how a more painstaking examination of the character could be remotely possible. Every Shadow fan really needs to get their hands on this, it's a worthwhile investment and easily warrants repeated viewings. My hat goes off to the makers of this documentary, I was 'wowed' from start to finish. Make no mistake, this is the definitive look at the Shadow phenomenon and one of the most underrated characters in pop culture.

Reviewed by Frank Warden

ANIME:

ANGEL BEATS!

Aniplex; 2010, 13 Episodes, Dir: Seiji Kishi, Writer: Jun Maeda; Cast: Hiroshi Kamiya, Harumi Sakurai, Kana Hanazawa.

GETTING OUT OF HEAVEN IS HELL

Set at a high school in the afterlife, *Angel Beats!* tells the story of a group of teenagers who fight against God for the unjust fates they endured during their lives. Otonashi, a newcomer to this purgatorial limbo, awakens with amnesia and is unable to recall anything from his life. Left with few options, Otonashi joins up with Yuri, a fearless girl and leader of the Afterlife Battlefront, a team that wages war on Angel, the mysterious girl who they believe has some connection to God. Equipped with all manner of weaponry and unable to "die", the Afterlife Battlefront plans to get to the bottom of why they're trapped at this spiritual waypoint, no matter who they have to confront to find out.

Angel Beats! has a unique, entirely original plot that sets it far apart from most other stories, both in anime *or* live-action. Blending quirky characters, genuine humor, adrenaline charged action and poignant, heartfelt storytelling, it's remarkable that *Angel Beats!* can retain each of these diverse qualities, but it does. One



scene may be carried with whimsical comedy that will have you laughing, while the next could be so downright melancholy it may have you shedding a tear. The writing is top notch; there are many great plot twists over the course of the series and the meaningful reveal of what the show's title exactly means was extraordinary.

The art style is very pleasing to the eye and the voice acting, both in the original Japanese language and English dub, is very well handled. Any criticism is directed purely at the meager 13 episodes that make up the series. *Angel Beats!* should have been double that, seeing as the characters are so engaging, the viewer wants to learn more about their backstory. Because of this, at times, the show feels rushed, but it never takes away from the overall experience.

Anyone looking for an anime with an imaginative premise and inspired writing has found it in *Angel Beats!* It's a series that will stay with you for some time, and has one of the most beautifully crafted endings I've ever had the pleasure of seeing. Don't go looking online for spoilers with this one either. The less you know going in, the better. Give it a chance, and you might just find something that leaves you breathless.

Reviewed by Lisa Stilts

TIGER & BUNNY

Sunrise; 2011, 25 Episodes, Dir: Keiichi Sato, Writer: Masafumi Nishida; Cast: Hiroaki Hirata, Masakazu Morita, Minako Kotobuki.

WHO WILL BE THE KING OF HEROES?

The metropolitan city of Sternbild is home to an assortment of costumed heroes, all of whom are 'Next' – humans with various super-powers. Each hero has a corporate sponsor and is featured on HeroTV, a reality television program that follows the heroes as they

apprehend criminals for reward points. At the end of the season, only one hero is crowned the "King of Heroes" based on their track record.

Kotetsu T. Kaburagi is Wild Tiger, a veteran hero experiencing a lull in his career. His reward point ratio for the current season is at an all-time low and his sponsor is dropping him. Fortunately, he is picked up by another corporation, given a new costume and – to his dismay – paired up with hero newcomer, Barnaby Brooks Jr. The two don't see eye-to-eye at first and are constantly at one another's throat. However, when new threats emerge, it becomes apparent that the bickering team will have to put aside their differences to save Sternbild

city.

Tiger & Bunny infuses some much needed life into the stale superhero formula. The reality television aspects and corporate interest in the heroes puts a fascinating spin on the concept. There are subtle nods to Marvel and DC Comics, but unlike *Watchmen* or *Kick Ass*, which try their best to dispel the superhero myth, *Tiger & Bunny* serves as a distinctive homage to the comic books of the 1960s and 1970s. Don't be misled



by the cutesy title either (Tiger often teases Barnaby by calling him 'Bunny', hence the show's name), *Tiger & Bunny* isn't aimed at the *Pokemon* crowd. While there's a decent share of humor throughout the series, it can often take on a very serious tone when needed.

A few episodes in and the series takes on a more solemn atmosphere than the initial handful of lighter adventures. The second season becomes even darker, but unlike Christopher Nolan's Batman films, the series never becomes so utterly dark that it loses its sense of fun. Differing from some anime titles, *Tiger & Bunny* has a certain "American" feel to it, and the show's ever-growing popularity in both Japan and North America is a testament to just how creative and original the show is. It helps that the characters aren't two-dimensional cut-outs and have more personality and development than most American superheroes, which even the latest collection of live-action franchises fail to compare.

Anime and comic fans will find much to enjoy here, especially those who are growing weary of the same old Marvel or DC rehashes, be it on the comic page or on the big screen. *Tiger & Bunny* proves that even in a tired genre, something unique can still be found.

By Frank Warden

VIDEO GAMES:

DEAD SPACE 3

Electronic Arts, 2013; Visceral Games; Platforms: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Windows..

'DEAD SPACE 3' SUFFERS FROM MOB MENTALITY

Dead Space 3 throws Isaac Clarke on a mission to the frozen planet of Tau Volantis, where he, alongside his reluctant sidekick John Carver, are forced to fight Necromorphs and Church of Unitology cultists in an effort to uncover the truth about the Marker, and find a way to stop it once and for all.

As a fan of the *Dead Space* series, I was really excited when the game came out, but I soon found myself suffering from a strange sense of déjà vu that I couldn't quite place. It wasn't until I realized that *Dead Space 3* was a lot like *Resident Evil 6*, that the feelings of boredom and annoyance I had experienced started to make sense.

Like *Resident Evil 6*, *Dead Space 3* is a game from a survival horror franchise that was turned into an action shooter. This decision to

change genres has caused a significant shift in the mood of the game, and not for the better. It went from establishing creeping dread and terror with an atmospheric use of dramatic lighting and suspenseful music, to a slow paced slog through unstoppable mobs of the undead.

There used to be a sense of trepidation when you were forced to explore a new area. Now, exploration is a chore. Every time you open a door or solve a puzzle you are immediately surrounded by a horde of creatures that you have to fight in order to continue. Even worse, the Necromorphs in *Dead Space 3* are bullet sinks; they have little to no reaction when they are shot.

In addition to the change in game mechanics, *Dead Space 3* uses a different game engine than its predecessors. This has made its aesthetic, or visual style, completely different. The enemies are less defined, and lack the amount of gruesome detail and variety that the first two games had. It's almost as though the game engine forced them to create generic Necromorph skins. The enemies of *Dead Space 3* have gone from being naked, undead monstrosities with all sorts of crazy mutations to bad guys that could be from just about any horror game out there. For instance, one of the Necromorphs is literally a guy wearing a coat and wielding an axe. That's right, a guy in a coat with an axe. Not exactly *Dead Space* material if you ask me.

Overall, the biggest change is the weapons system. You can now create your own weapon modifications, which is a lot of fun until you learn that your weapon slots have been cut in half. Before you could carry up to four weapons. Now you can only carry two guns in your inventory, and typically at least one of them has been modified at a weapons bench, which would be fine if the guns worked. Unfortunately, the game doesn't give you a chance to test the new mods, it just throws you head-first into a horde of Necromorphs, leaving you praying that the new gun will work on them.

Since the game automatically saves for you before you go to fight with this new weapon, you can't go back to the last save point and undo the most recent



modification you made, let alone try another one to see what works.

For example, in the first boss fight on Tau Volantis, the game reloads at the exact point where you go to encounter the enemy after you've made the mods. This new game mechanic means that most of the time you are playing the game blind. You are forced to play with the modded gun, even if it is entirely ineffective and that, is just plain frustrating.

While *Resident Evil 6* didn't change its own inventory or weapon system, it still suffered from the same problems that are painfully apparent in *Dead Space 3*, the biggest one being that of mob mentality.

Action shooters generally use hordes of enemies to create a frenetic gaming pace, and that is one of the things that makes them so popular. That particular game mechanic was adopted by creators of survival horror games with the hope being that it would make the game more intense and scary to play. Unfortunately, survival horror has always worked best when there were only a handful of enemies to fight, typically in cramped quarters, which is something that *Dead Space* did quite well in the first two installments but abandoned in the third.

Ultimately, Capcom and EA had decided to transform their survival horror franchises into action shooters in a desperate money grab. Both companies have fallen into the same trap that they may never be able to claw their way out of: the belief that since *Gears of War* and other co-op action shooters are popular and sell well, if a survival horror game is transformed into one, it too will become very lucrative. So far, this hasn't been the case. Both Capcom and EA have lost money by giving their survival horror franchises an unnecessary facelift.

If they wanted to cash in on the genre, they

should've made a new game that was an action shooter, not mutate their survival horror franchises into bloated monstrosities that are a chore to play through. One can only hope that they have learned from their mistakes, otherwise we will continue to see survival horror games transformed into terrible action shooters like *Dead Space 3*.

Reviewed by Cassie Carnage
More horror video game, movie and
book reviews by Cassie can be found at
CassiesHouseofHorror.blogspot.com

TRANSFORMERS: FALL OF CYBERTRON

Activision; 2012, High Moon Studios; Platforms: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Windows.

DOES IT HAVE 'THE TOUCH'?

It's hard to believe that the *Transformers* started as a toy line in the 1980s. Now, nearly thirty years later, the brand is more popular than ever before. Though *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron* was released last summer, the title still warrants a review for those who may have missed out on it.

For the few who might be unfamiliar with the *Transformers*, the story follows two factions of warring robots capable of changing into vehicles to disguise themselves: the heroic Autobots and the evil Decepticons. In 2010 Activision and High Moon Studios released *Transformers: War for Cybertron*, the first video game to do the franchise justice. A third-person shooter, *War* is a prequel to the *Transformers* mythos, covering the early conflict between the Autobots and Decepticons on their home planet, Cybertron. Deservedly so, *War for Cybertron* received



high praise from critics. Being a huge *Transformers* fan, I loved it (I can't count the number of hours I sunk into the online multiplayer). The story and writing were excellent, the gameplay was intuitive, and the graphics were eye-boggling. It was easily my favorite game of 2010.

High Moon's take on the *Transformers* saga proved to be a hit and Activision requested a sequel; by early 2011 *Fall of Cybertron* was revealed to be in development. I was literally counting down the days to the game's release – August of 2012 couldn't have arrived fast enough.

Much to my surprise, *Fall of Cybertron* left me with mixed feelings. Many of the new gameplay elements were welcome additions, most notably allowing the player to control Grimlock, an Autobot that can transform into a nearly unstoppable robotic dinosaur. And let's not forget Bruticus, the gigantic merged form of six Decepticons. These levels were a blast and offered some needed diversity to the game. Much like *War for Cybertron*, the sequel was split into numerous chapters, letting the player control either a specific Autobot or Decepticon. Unlike the first game, however, *Fall of Cybertron* really makes use of the characters' specific abilities. For instance, two Transformers can utilize a grappling hook to get them to out-of-reach locations inaccessible to most others. Another couple of characters have a cloaking ability that adds a stealth aspect to their respective levels. Some of the most intriguing missions allow the gamer to control Optimus Prime who has linked up with the city-sized Autobot, Metroplex. Optimus can call in an air-strike, capable of wiping out numerous Decepticons with a single attack.

As could be expected, the graphics department manages to surpass the already impressive designs for *War of Cybertron*. Thankfully, High Moon has continued to remain truer to the *Transformers'* original cartoon appearance than the Michael Bay abominations. Praise is due to the exceptional voice acting, which includes Peter Cullen as Optimus Prime and Gregg Berger as Grimlock, reprising their respective roles from the '80s cartoon.

Not all has been for the better though. *War for Cybertron* had offered co-op gameplay during the campaign missions, it was a neat addition for friends to play side-by-side, but this feature was removed in the sequel. Further, the online multiplayer has been cannibalized. While there are more options to customize your Transformers, it comes at a steep cost. No longer do vehicle modes have special abilities in multiplayer. In *War*, jets could do barrel rolls and trucks could ram opponents – these have been discarded here. There are a number of questionable weapon omissions too, like the lack of grenades (aside from the useless EMP grenades). The weapon selection itself was better and more varied in *War for Cybertron*, despite the benefits of more upgrades in *Fall*. The only real improvement to multiplayer this time around is the ability to play as the



Dinobots – but they have to be downloaded, for a price (currently \$9.99).

Regardless of the issues that affect *Fall of Cybertron* it's still a phenomenal game. It never quite reaches the heights of its predecessor, nor is the story as involving, but High Moon's latest *Transformers* venture is still a fun ride while it lasts.

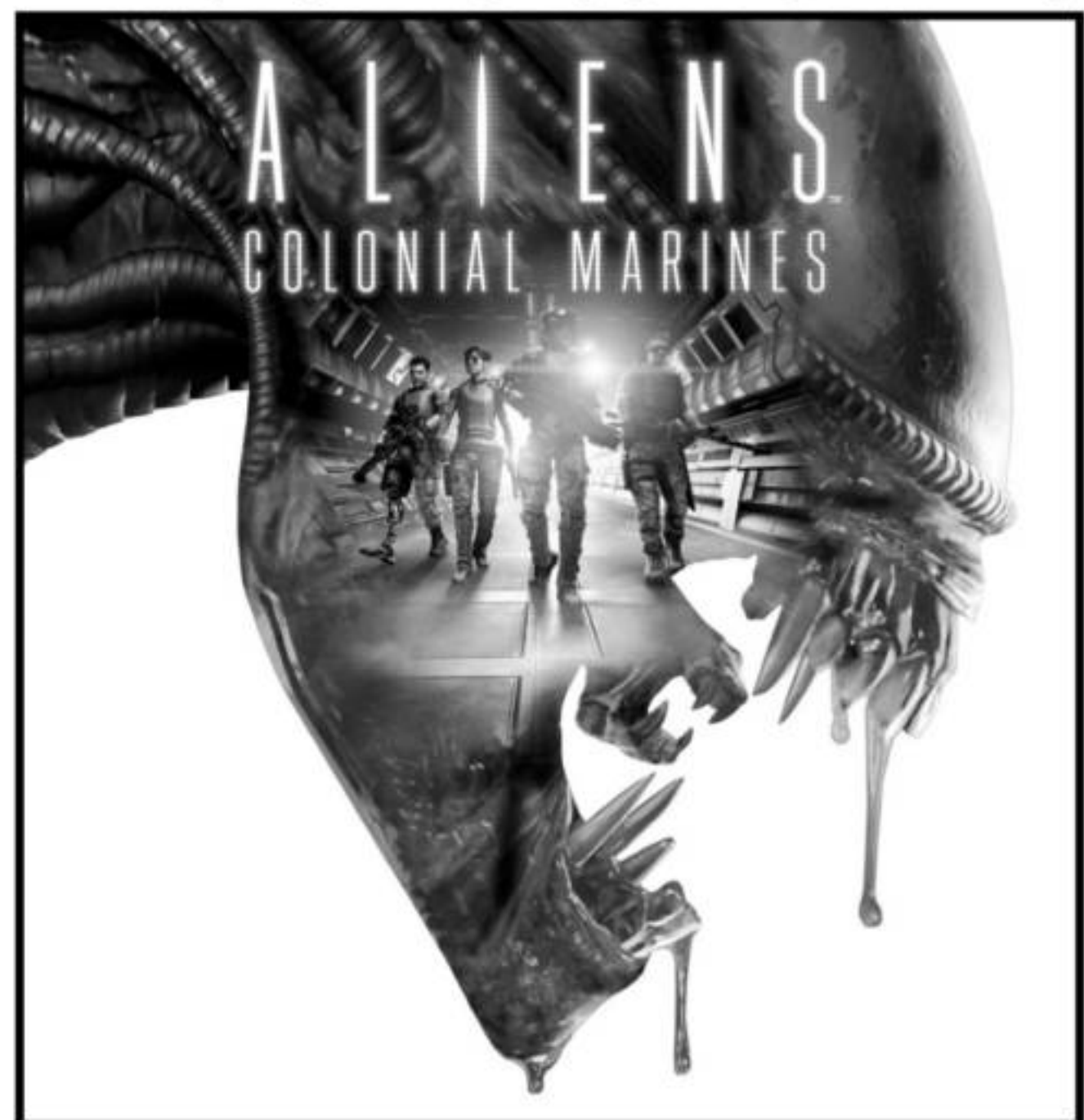
Reviewed by Stuart Kelly

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Sega; 2013, Gearbox Software; Platforms: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Windows.

A MESSY BUG HUNT

It's never a good omen when a video game takes longer than a decade to be released. Originally announced for the PlayStation 2 back in 2001, *Aliens: Colonial Marines* has had a lengthy production history fraught with set-backs, delays and no small share of controversy. By 2012 gameplay footage was finally





"ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES" Copyright 2013 Sega. All Rights Reserved.

released and many agreed that the long overdue title looked promising. Well, they say 'good things come to those who wait', but apparently, so does mediocrity.

Aliens: Colonial Marines takes place shortly after the events of *Aliens* (1986) and *Alien 3* (1992), with a group of marines searching for Ellen Ripley aboard the U.S.S. Sulaco. As one could imagine, they run into a few familiar creatures and chaos ensues. Ultimately, *Colonial Marines* is a double-edged sword. *Alien* fans will delight in using the pulse rifle, flamethrowers and installing sentry turrets, all of which are rendered in extreme detail and compliment their cinematic counterparts nicely. Welding doors shut to keep out the xenomorph hordes is another fun little addition. There are a few surprises along the way that eagle-eyed gamers and fans of the franchise will notice (see if you can spot the head of Newt's doll or the depleted sentry turrets from *Aliens*). If anything, the level design earns its share of praise and a wide variety of xenomorphs are on hand to provide excellent target practice as well. The soundtrack keeps true to the movies that inspired the game and adds an unsettling atmosphere to the experience. And for those eager to hop online with friends, there's a decent amount of mileage from the several, albeit limited, multiplayer modes. Currently, as of this writing, more downloadable multiplayer content is being released.

For all the things that *Colonial Marines* does right, it still manages to crash and burn faster than a dropship on LV-426. The A.I. fumbles between inept and atrocious. This goes for your marine teammates who, at times, are worse than useless and simply stare off into a wall or corner while your marine is being swarmed by xenomorphs. Though the player won't need to fret too much, since the enemy A.I. doesn't fare any better. As with several recent games, *Colonial Marines* is

plagued by frequent bugs and glitches. Xenomorphs here aren't the deadly, resourceful creatures seen in the movies, but tend to be clumsy and erratic. It's no help that they're literally passing *through* walls thanks to faulty game design. Another major issue is the graphics, which are lacking when compared to earlier gameplay footage, demos, and screenshots.

Clearly, *Colonial Marines* is not without its faults, but it does have its share of merits. Die-hard *Alien* fans will give it a try either way and, at the very least, it's worth a rental. It's just a shame that with over a decade to release what could have been a polished, refined game – and a true sequel to James Cameron's *Aliens* (as *Colonial Marines* had been repeatedly stated to be by Sega) – we received an end product that appears rushed.

Reviewed by August Holden

LITERATURE:

ODDS & ENDS: AN ASSORTMENT OF SORTS

Raw Dog Screaming Press; 2013, 60 pages;

Author: Dustin LaValley

HORROR THAT STAYS WITH YOU

LaValley first began writing genre-bending flash fiction and short stories with the collection *Lowlife Underdogs* and moved on to longer forms such as the novella and the novel. Though here, in *Odds & Ends: An Assortment of Sorts* he proves that it doesn't take 80,000 words to tell a riveting, moving story. With

every aspect of its longer counterparts, the micro-short story is simply a novel without the foo-foo and only a tried and true wordsmith can create a compelling and worthy story in under 250 words (the self-assigned maximum word limit of LaValley's micro-fiction). And the author proves himself here many times over to be more than capable of the feat. From rising action, climax, falling action and resolution (beginning, middle and end) to that of character development, the setting, atmosphere and even backstory, LaValley's tiny tales provoke that sought after shock and absorption a good story should leave a reader.

Instructed as an experiment by an English professor while in college, the author began writing micro-short stories (some may call them vignettes) to help expand his creative output and exercise his ability to word-work. It was there that his love for the form was found and perhaps even there, that the foundations for this collection were conceived.

These stories, though very short, make you feel and think. They transfer you into their worlds and there you linger for a time until moving to the next. "Summertime Nightmare" leaves the reader with a chill from an uneasy autumn breeze. "Found and Lost" brings back personal past regrets. "Virgin Birth" and "Imaginary Worlds" makes us wonder if getting what we want is for the best. "Routine" gives us a look inside an act of sympathy while "Sadomasochistic Man" brings us an act of negative pleasure. The sense of lost innocence, of childhood wonder and bemusement are visited in "Is This Death?" while true-life horrors of obsession are proposed in "ASL" and "A Secret Love."

Odds & Ends: An Assortment of Sorts is exactly that, an assortment of many themes and values written in the least amount of words while delivering the most amount of impact. Though this is not a themed collection, they all have one central link: darkness. Within all of the fifty micro-short stories is the essence of darkness; within the world, society, community and most frightening of all, the darkness within ourselves.

With *Odds & Ends: An Assortment of Sorts* LaValley uses the one-inch punch method of fiction with "less is more." For those readers looking for a change in formula and format of fiction, this small yet powerful collection is a big, beautifully dark step toward a new era of literature.

Reviewed by Thomas Pearsons

BLACKOUT

2012, 32 pages; Contributors: P.M. Buchan, Jack Fallows, Phillip Marsden, Andrew Waugh, Joe Whiteford, Mike Barnes.

A DETOUR INTO DARK TERRITORY

Comic books have taken a hit in the horror genre. They've become what the publishers have found makes money: plain, and in doing so, keep the vogue going of safe, trendy and steady. We're not talking horror with these publishers. We're talking kid and middle-age woman safe. Nothing offensive. Offensive doesn't sell too well. Those that are pushing against

what the mainstream publishers are feeding us is because of love. That's one thing that can't be monitored by any monetary system. The love of creating. Luckily, there are creators out there who recognize what really is thrilling, creepy, terrible and horrible and are doing so out of the love of the genre and the format. The creators of *Blackout* are a handful of those I speak of.

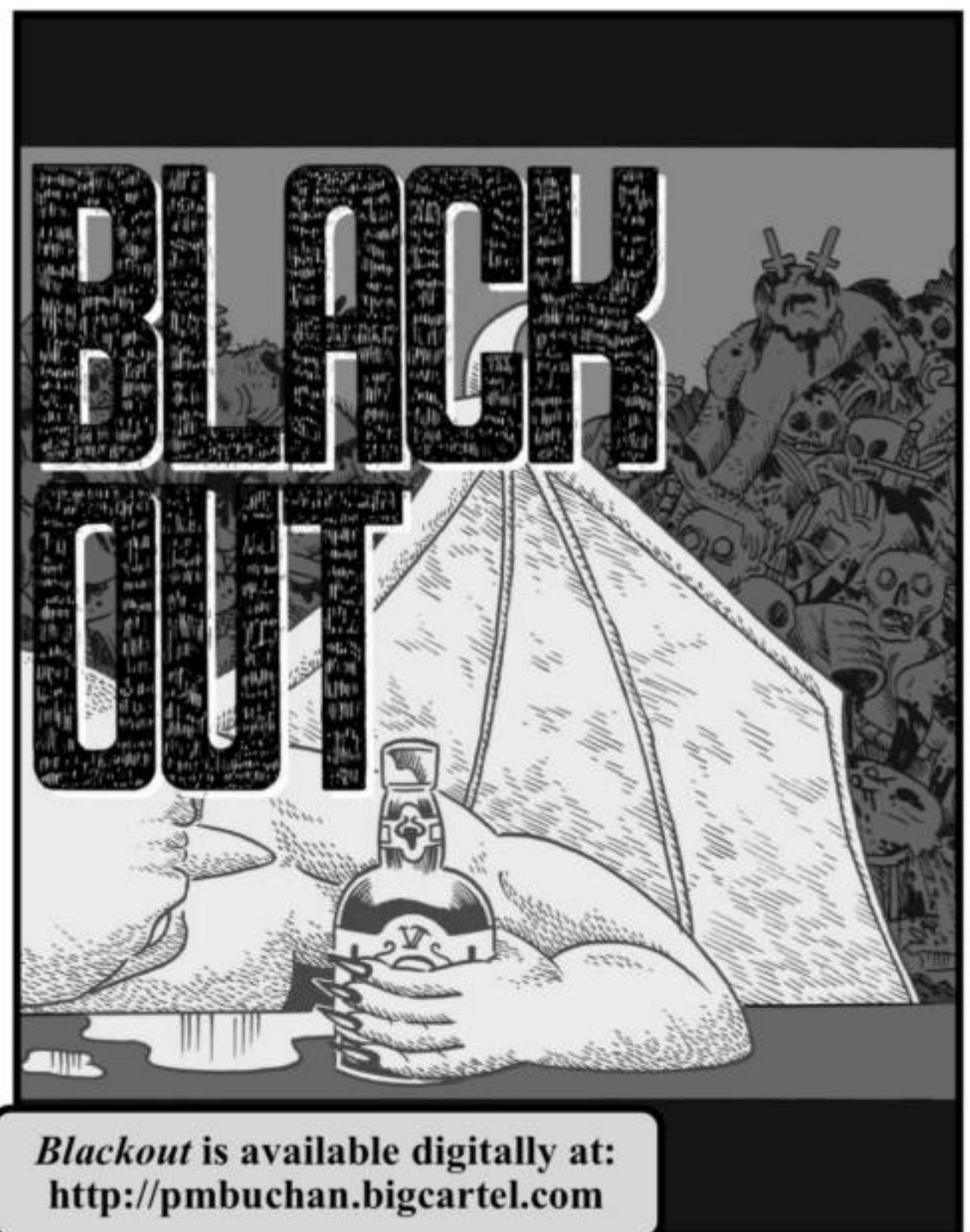
There is nothing safe about *Blackout*. This comic book, made up of several stories is at times unsettling, darkly humorous and over the top. And, at all times completely entertaining. The maladjusted will adapt well to the stories within.

The artwork is a style similar to the comics of old; the flat visual style of EC Comics series' *Vault of Horror*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and *The Haunt of Fear*, meeting with today's pop-art movement.

As on the comic book itself, there is an "adults only" warning that I'll place here as it is very graphic and like previously stated, not safe. Which is the best route to go in today's ever-edited world. P.M. Buchan, the main driving force behind the concept is not easily cooed by the standards of today's shelter in major trade horror initiatives and it's upon reading and seeing the material that we are made well aware of the fact he is fighting the norms. There is sex with the dead, drunken clowns, sex dolls come to life, cross-dressing, suicide, murder, cannibalism, grave robbing, sadomasochism, broken hearts and lost romances.

This full-color, 32-page horror comic book is nothing less than a sick, twisted and totally fun read for any depraved soul out there looking for a companion in this sanitary world of ours.

Reviewed by Dustin LaValley



Blackout is available digitally at:
<http://pmbuchan.bigcartel.com>

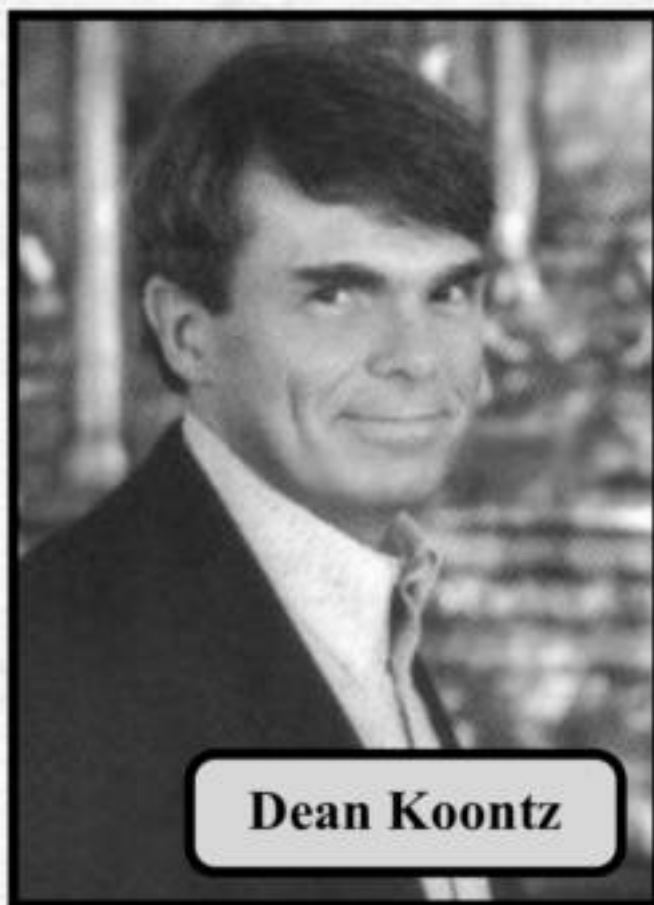
THE WOEFUL FILMOGRAPHY OF DEAN KOONTZ

By Joseph Rubas

Film is a powerful medium: it has made stars and fools out of men since its advent, and has informed public consciousness on a number of topics. Many people out there are adamant that things happened just because they saw it in a movie. For example, there are dozens of moviegoers who believe that the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* really is based on a true story (the remake especially: the grainy black-and-white footage of Leatherface fooled many into thinking that the whole thing was terribly real). Also, it is common knowledge that First Officer William Murdoch, of the R.M.S. Titanic, committed suicide on the deck as the ship went down. And, in this case, common knowledge is wrong. Murdoch did indeed commit suicide in the storied 1997 film *Titanic*, but accounts from the actual tragedy place him dying a hero, helping passengers and working feverishly to free a set of canvas-bottomed collapsible boats lashed to the roof of the officers' quarters, *not* shooting people and taking bribes, as James Cameron imagined.

The point is, movies are, as I said, powerful things. Though his books made him famous, Stephen King's films cemented his position as America's dark storyteller. His debut novel *Carrie*, published in 1974, was adapted to the screen in 1976 by Brian De Palma and proved immensely successful. From then to now, King's books have been regularly made into movies, most of them highly popular. He owes much of his success to film.

Movies have made Stephen King a household name, mainly because they are high quality and faithful to the source material, which was good enough for bestseller status in its own right. But on the other hand, movies have made almost nothing of another highly sought after author: Dean Koontz. A familiar name to general readers and literary thrill seekers alike, Koontz has authored over fifty novels, many of them appearing on the prestigious *New York Times Bestseller List*, and for good reason. He isn't called the "Dean of Suspense" for nothing. His works are tight, explosive, and breathtaking, building and maintaining dizzying levels of tension, something that is very difficult to do on the



Dean Koontz

written page. Several of his many novels are considered minor horror/sci-fi classics, including *Watchers* (1987), *Mr. Murder* (1993), and the "Odd Thomas" novels (2003 to present).

Koontz began writing as a teenager, winning an *Atlantic Monthly* fiction contest in 1965. Like a shark tasting blood, Koontz was unstoppable thereafter,

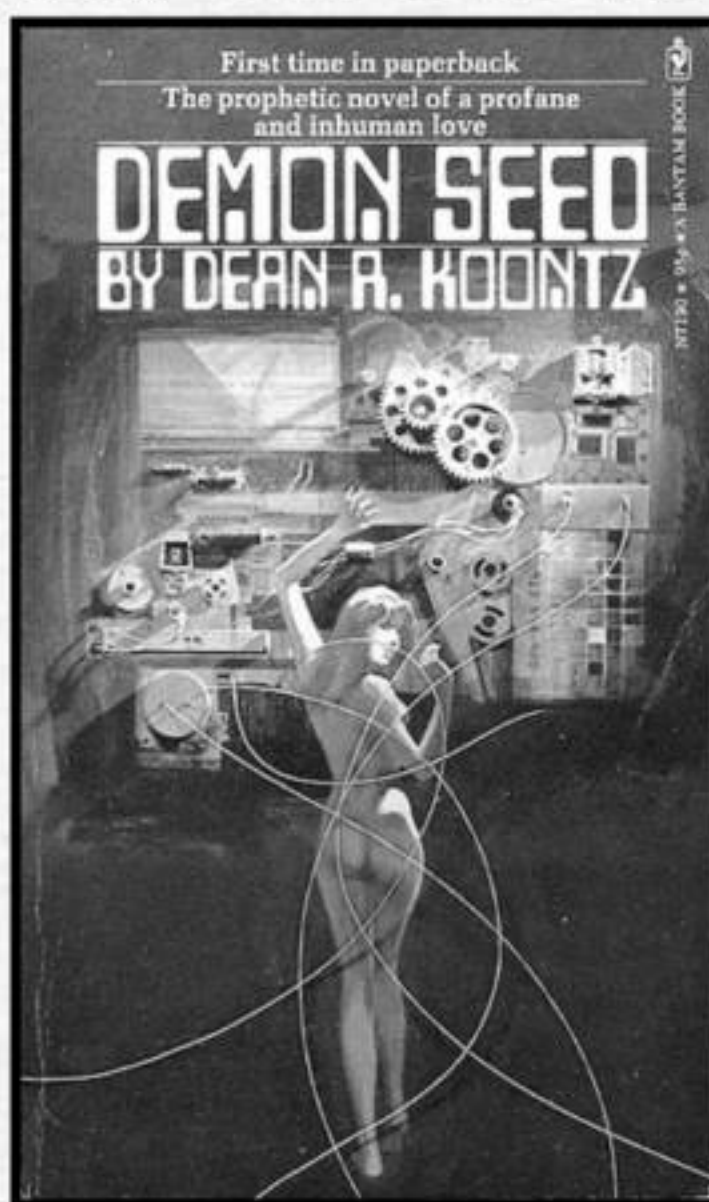
penning more novels and short stories than one could ever hope to read, employing various pseudonyms over the years (as Brian Coffey, he penned an episode of *CHiPs* in 1979). His first (modest) bestseller was *Demon Seed* in 1973. Prior to the success of *Whispers*, several of his novels sold over a million copies in paperback (they were all written under pennames). From 1980 onward, Koontz has become a literary

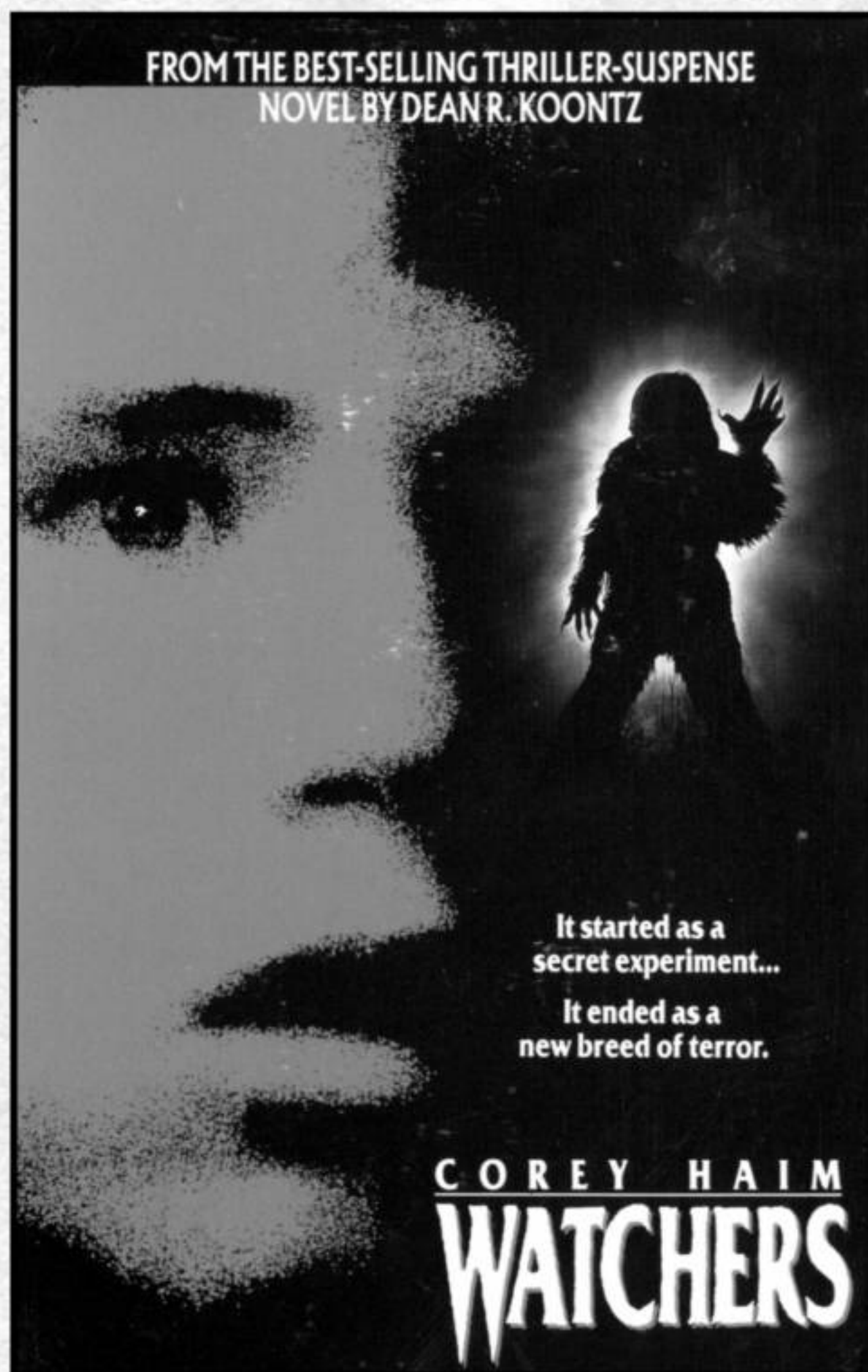
juggernaut, tying the position for sixth highest paid author alive with John Grisham.

But as good as he is, he has failed to reach the same heights as Stephen King for one reason: his movies are terrible.

The first feature film based on Koontz's work was *Demon Seed* in 1977. It was met with muted positivity, but varied from Koontz's original text. That same year, a French film titled *The Intruder* was released based on Koontz's *Shattered*. An obscure film even in its own day, the film has been praised for its suspense.

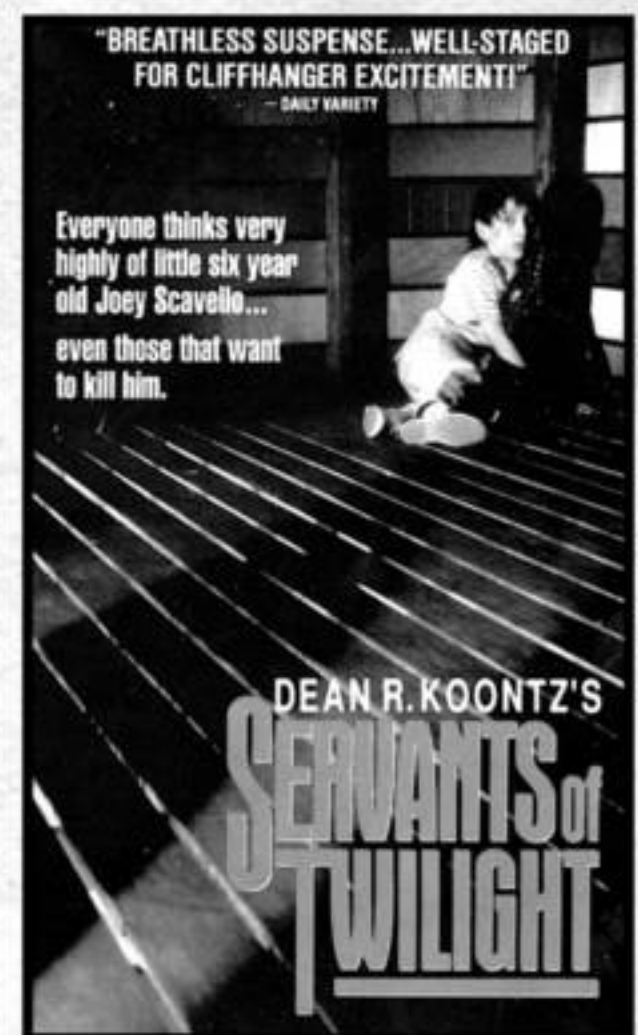
During much of the eighties, Koontz was busy scaring the daylights out of America to worry about





Hollywood. But in 1988, Universal Pictures released *Watchers*. Starring Cory Haim (*The Lost Boys*), the film deviated significantly from the novel. In the book (which is about bioengineered super-smart animals), the main character is a grown man. In the movie, however, he's turned into a teenager in what one can only imagine was a failed attempt to appeal to younger audiences. This change in age precipitated an across-the-board alteration that took the film far from the novel. Even taken on its own, it's still a bad and poorly-executed film. The production values remind one of daytime soap operas and the writing was simply awful. It was successful enough, however, to spawn several sequels.

More subpar films followed into the nineties, the standouts being *The Servants of Twilight* (1991) and *Hideaway* (1995). And by standouts, I mean the worst. *Hideaway*, which starred Jeff Goldblum, deviated so much from the novel that Koontz lobbied the studio to have his name removed from the finished product. His main complaint was that an eight-year-old girl from the novel was needlessly turned into a "teenage sex-pot." The novel's main plotline (aside from a man clinically dying and returning from the grave with a psychic link to a demonic sociopath) involves a couple adopting a young handicapped girl from an orphanage. Children and innocence play a prominent role in Koontz's work, and was appalled at the change (among many, many other things). Reviews of the film were resoundingly



negative, though Roger Ebert seemed to like it for what it was: disposable horror cinema. He even said that moviegoers seeking such would get their money's worth.

The next notable Koontz film was *Mr. Murder*, starring Stephen Baldwin, which was adapted for TV and aired on ABC in 1998. Reviews were mixed, but *Mr. Murder* failed to capture the taunt suspense of the novel, and ended up flopping like a fish on the beach.

In 2011, it was announced that a film adaptation of Koontz's beloved novel *Odd Thomas* would be coming to the screen. A Dean Koontz movie typically spells disaster, but Koontz is reportedly happy with the finished product, saying, "The script is a spot-on, blow-out-the-walls, edge-of-your-chair, emotionally moving, thrill-packed, dazzlingly fresh, in-your-face, stunningly structured, absolute masterpiece that reinvents the tentpole picture by giving it meaning beyond spectacle and heart that should make it the biggest damn date movie ever."

Finally, a piece that Koontz is excited about.

The Films of Dean Koontz

Demon Seed (1977)

Starring Julie Christie and Robert Vaughn. Directed by Donald Cammell, *Demon Seed* was released by MGM on April 8, 1977, and follows the developer of a super smart computer program as, in Frankensteinian fashion, his creation turns on him. Reviews were moderately positive.

The Intruder (1977) (released in France as *The Passengers*)

Also handled by MGM, *The Intruder* stars Jean-Louis Trintignant and was directed by Serge Leroy. In it, a man and his stepson are stalked along European highways by a psychopath.

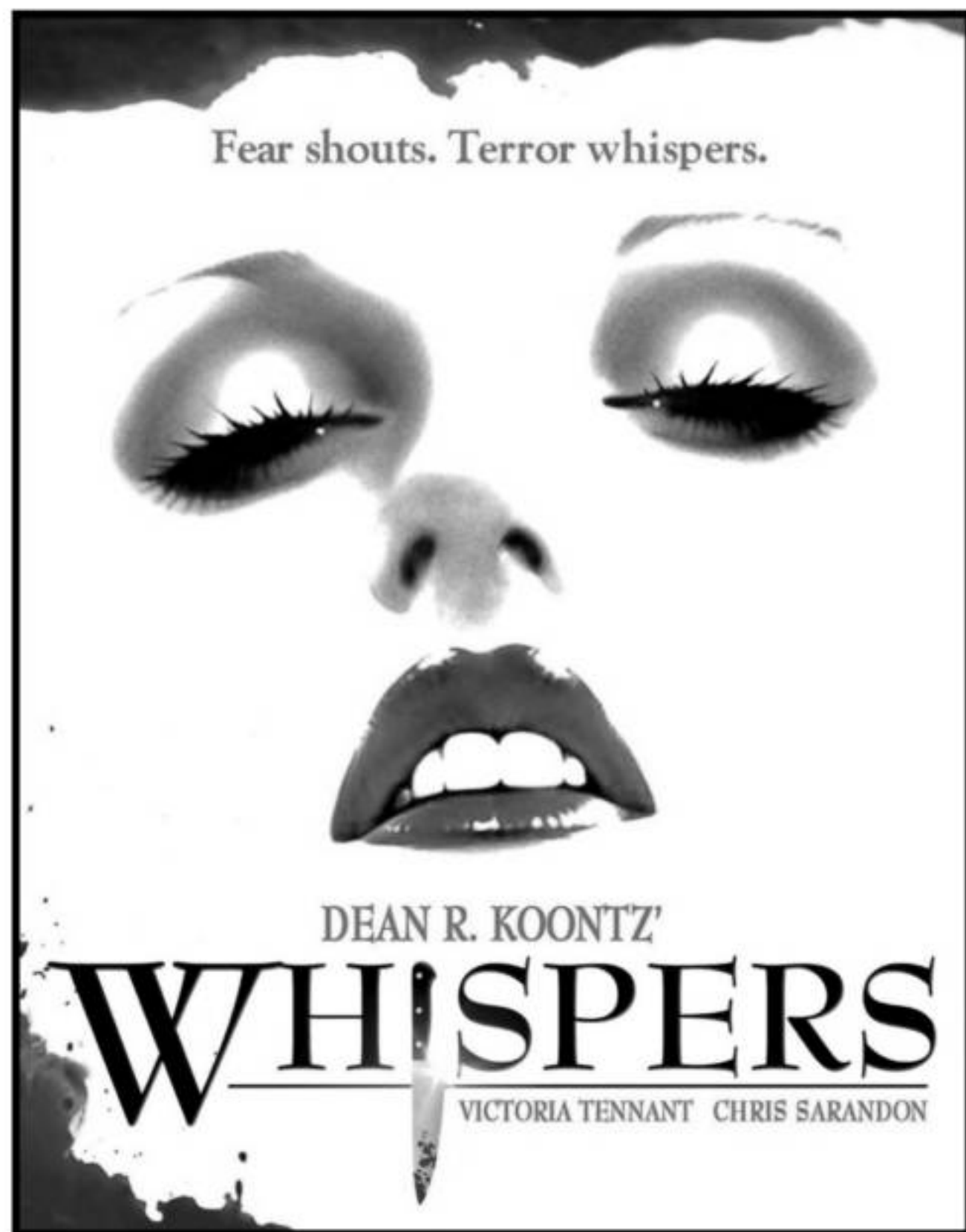
Watchers (1988)

Starring the poor man's teen idol Cory Haim, *Watchers* finds a young boy sheltering a super intelligent dog from a monstrous stalker and a cache of government

villains. Directed by Jon Hess, *Watchers* was given a limited theatrical release and was released twice on home video (VHS in 1989 and DVD in 2003). Reviews were largely negative.

Whispers (1990)

A successful L.A. screenwriter is attacked by a man she previously met, only to discover that it's not him, but his evil twin. Victoria Tennant stars.



Watchers 2 (1990)

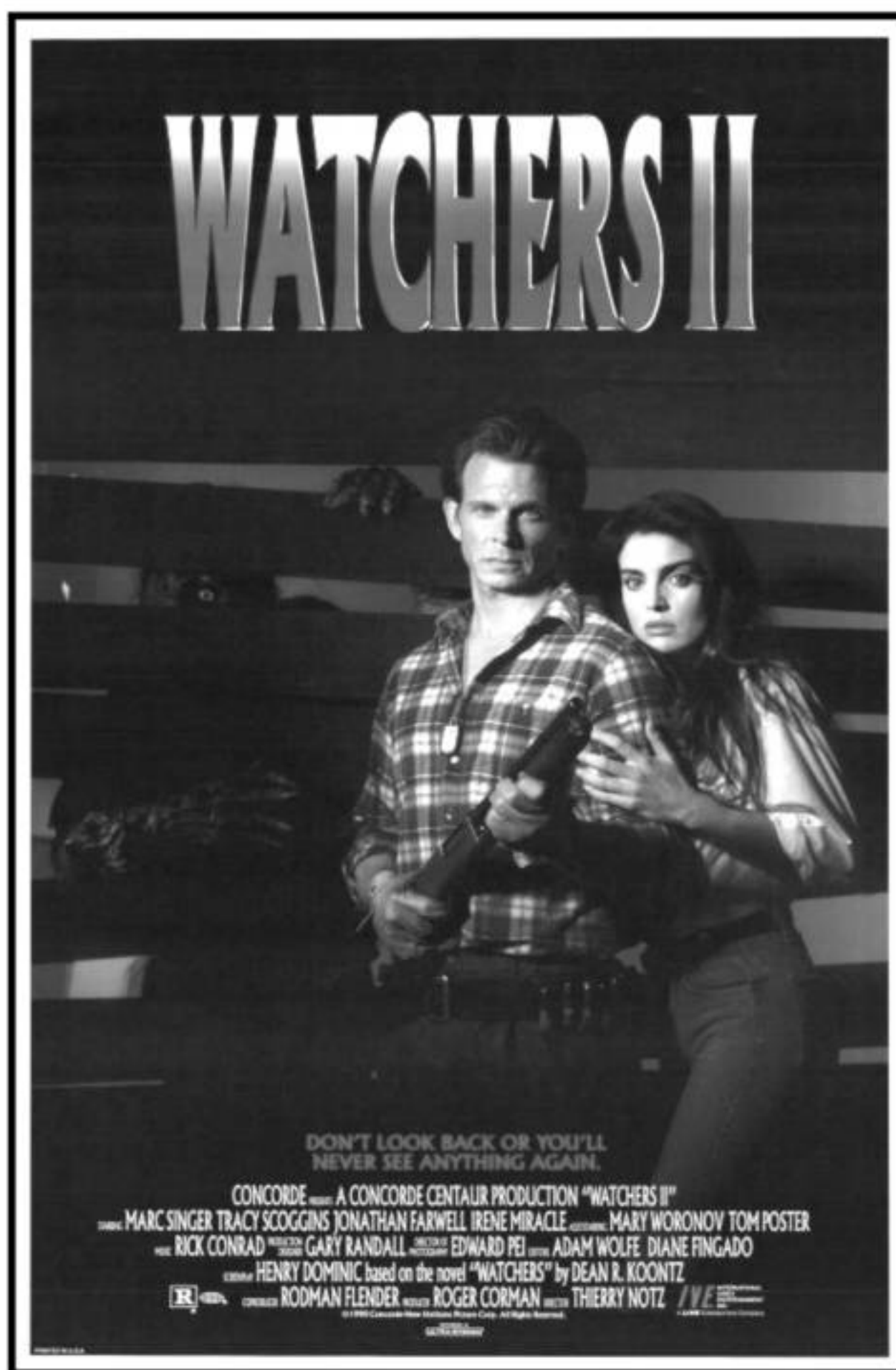
A direct-to-video release, *Watchers 2* is little more than the plot of the first film heated up and re-served to an unsuspecting public. Koontz had nothing to do with this one (aside from writing the original novel) and has been highly critical of it.

The Face of Fear (1990)

A television movie that aired on CBS on September 30, 1990, *The Face of Fear* benefits greatly from a Koontz-penned teleplay. Regardless, it made hardly a ripple when it first ran. It certainly didn't hurt Koontz's reputation, but it didn't really help either, being just another middle-of-the-line TV movie in an age of middle-of-the-line TV movies. Farhad Mann directed, and William Sadler, best known for his various appearances on *Tales From the Crypt*, plays Anthony Prine.

The Servants of Twilight (1991)

A group of cultists lead by a demented psychic



attempt to murder a small boy who they believe might be the antichrist. Directed by Jeffrey Obrow, *Twilight* was met with universal criticism.

Watchers 3 (1994)

In this highly uninspired third entry, a group of mercenaries are dispatched to catch a bioengineered monster in the jungles of South America. Their ranks are decimated in short order, and their only hope winds up being the monster's opposite number: A golden retriever with a I.Q. of 175. Many contemporary critics accused the film of stealing the plotline from *Predator*. While the films are somewhat similar, *Watchers 3* steals more from *Watchers* than it does from *Predator*.

Hideaway (1995)

After dying in a traffic accident, Hatch Harrison (Jeff Goldblum) is revived and accidentally establishes a psychic link with a demon inhabiting the body of a dead Satanist. Koontz was so disappointed with the film that he went to great lengths to have his name removed from it. He succeeded in getting it removed from major marketing campaigns, but it still appeared in the opening credits.

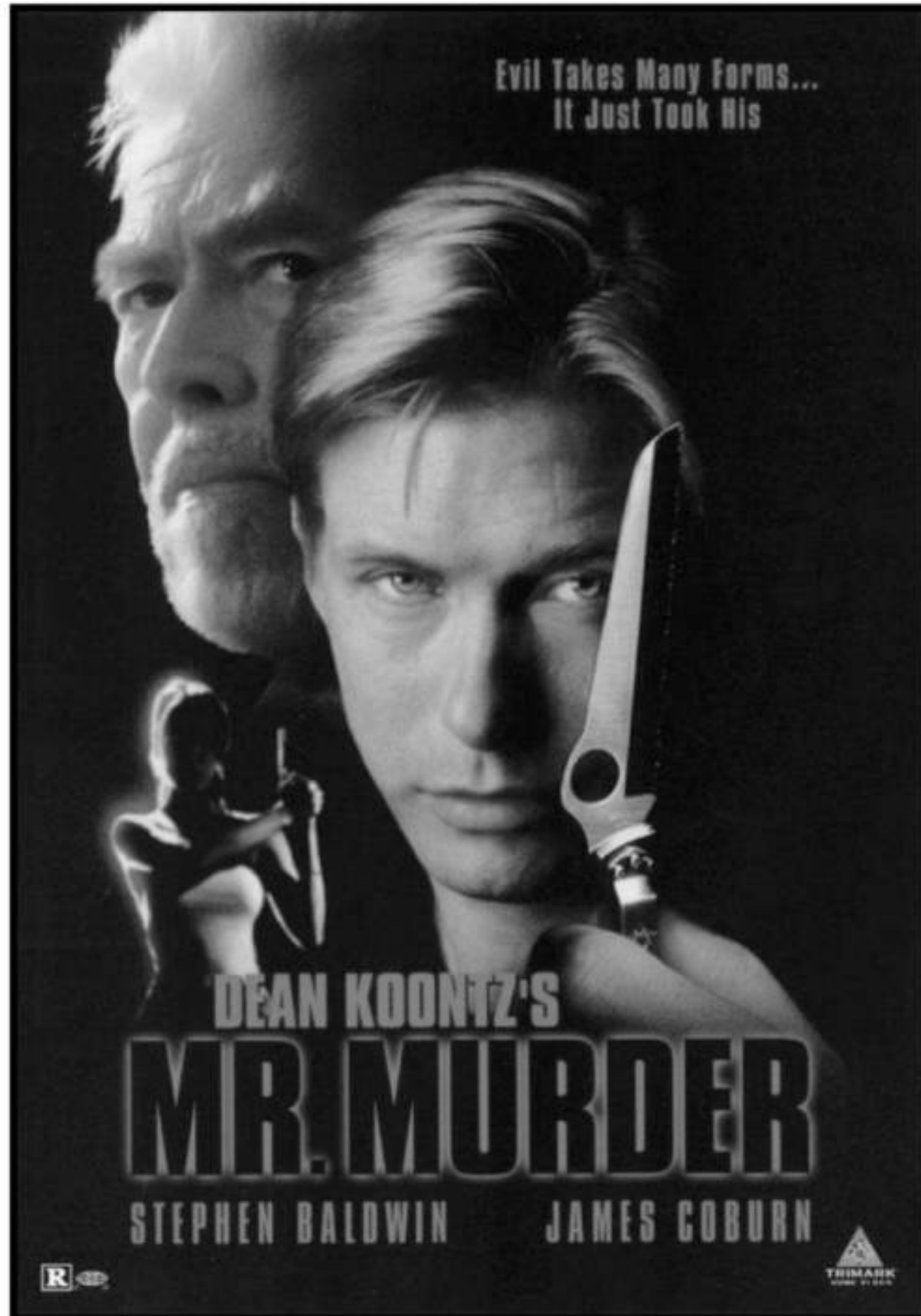
Intensity (1997)

In this obscure, made-for-TV gem, a woman

survives a bloody visit from a sociopathic serial killer and then sets out for revenge. Directed by Yves Simoneau, *Intensity* aired on Fox on August 5, 1997. The film sticks pretty close to the novel, though there were some routine omissions (as they always are when adapting to the screen). Nevertheless, *Intensity* stands as one of the best Koontzian films ever made.

Mr. Murder (1998)

Made for TV and starring Stephen Baldwin, *Mr. Murder* finds a man stalked by a killing machine made in his own likeness.



Phantoms (1998)

Two sisters are trapped in a Colorado resort town by an ancient entity bent on destroying the world. Stars Rose McGowan, Ben Affleck, and Peter O'Toole. Stays fairly close to the novel.

Watchers Reborn (1998)

The same basic premise as the other films, except this time the protagonist is a cop.

Sole Survivor (2000)

While not the best Dean Koontz film, *Sole Survivor*, which aired on Fox in September 2000, is close. Starring Billy Zane as Joe Carpenter, *Sole*



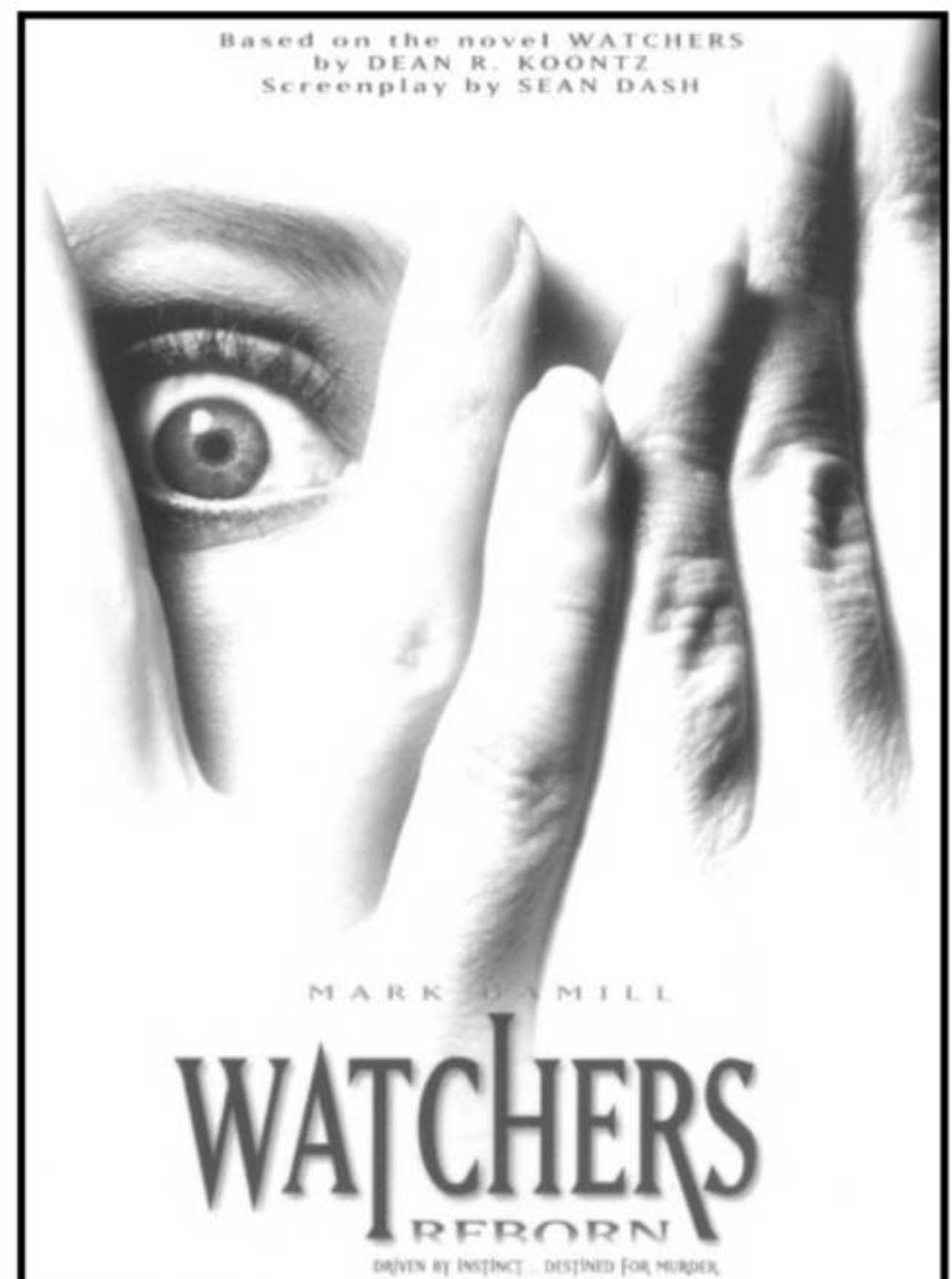
Survivor follows a journalist who discovers that the plane crash that killed his wife and daughter is part of a government conspiracy, and that his daughter might have survived. Dean Koontz produced and Richard Christian Matheson wrote the screenplay.

Black River (2001)

Based on a short story by Koontz, *Black River* is about a writer who stumbles upon a small, idyllic town only to become trapped. Starring Jay Mohr, it aired on Fox on July 6, 2001.

Odd Thomas (2013)

A short order cook living in the California desert uses his ability to see ghosts as a way of bringing justice to evildoers and saving lives from impending catastrophes. Starring Anton Yelchin and Willem Dafoe, directed by Stephen Sommers.



SHADOWMAIL



LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS

Dear Shadowland,

Issue #7 was a winner! Brilliant articles, all of them. I especially enjoyed Frank Warden's piece, "Dystopian Cinema: How Fear, Tension & Uncertainty Created a Sub-Genre". Not only was it well researched, but also very entertaining and informative. I always look forward to Mr. Warden's next article (congratulations to him, by the way, on the Rondo nomination for his "All Shall Listen When the Bat Whispers" piece from *Shadowland* #3).

And congratulations are also in order for everyone at Shadowland, it's a thrill to finally be able to pick up your excellent publication at Barnes and Noble! It was a very pleasant surprise to see several copies on the shelf at my local B&N. Hands down,

Shadowland is my favorite genre magazine currently being published, love the diversity you offer.

Best,
Peter Szwarc

People of the Shadowland,

Just found out about *Shadowland* from stumbling on a copy at the bookstore. Nice work! The *Planet of the Apes*-themed cover of General Ursus was crazy cool. It literally 'popped' off the shelf. Dwayne Pinkney is one heck of an artist. His Lou Ferrigno/Hulk write-up was sweet. I agree completely, Ferrigno deserves more credit as an actor. And that article on the *Evil Dead*? Well done!! And, as an anime fan, I appreciate the

content on *Dragon Ball Z* too.

Can't wait for the next issue,
Brian Hayes

Hey Gang,

I just wanted to say you are doing a great job with this mag. The cover art is awesome. As soon as I laid my eyes on the mag I was drawn in by the art. The articles are really well written and informative. I really don't have anything negative I can say about *Shadowland*, I love it. It's like *Fangoria* meets *Starlog*, how can you go wrong? I just put in for my subscription and can't wait to get the new ones in. Keep up the great work.

John Wise

Jim Kavanaugh

Horror Illustrator



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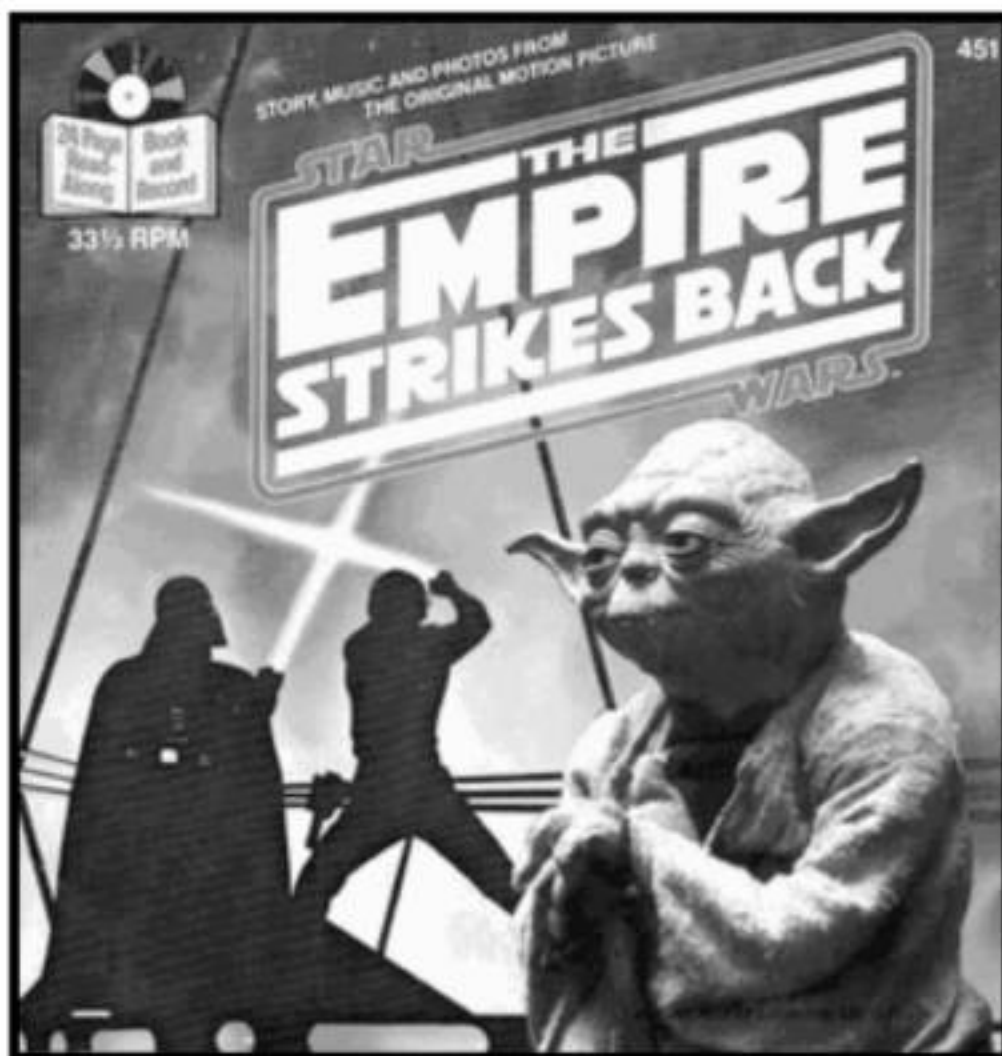


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*Star Wars: The Empire
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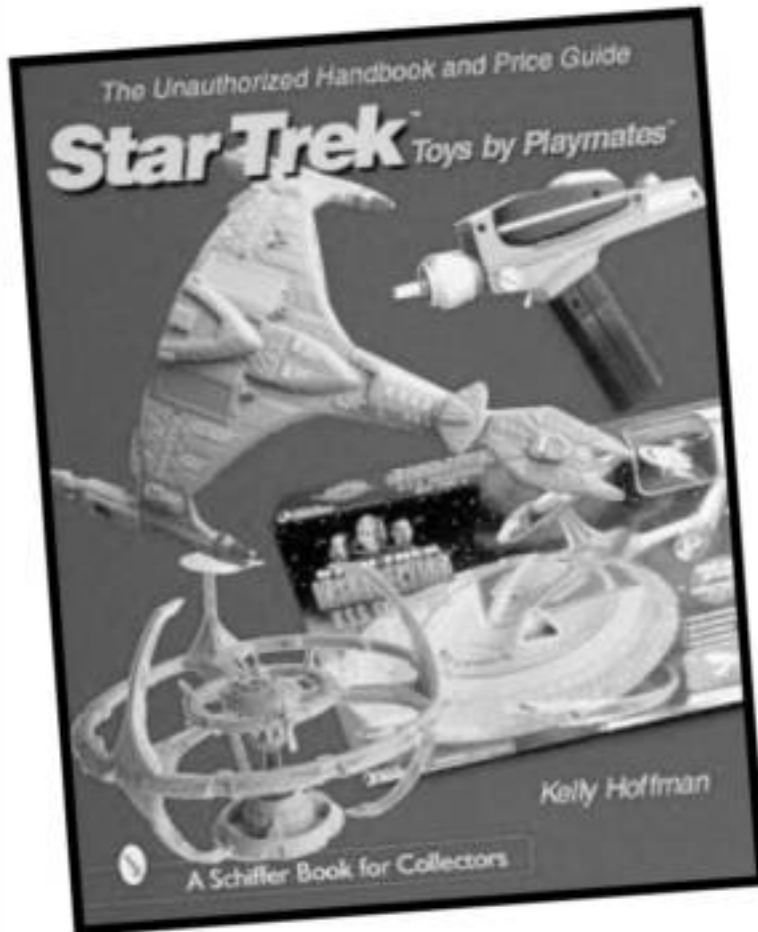
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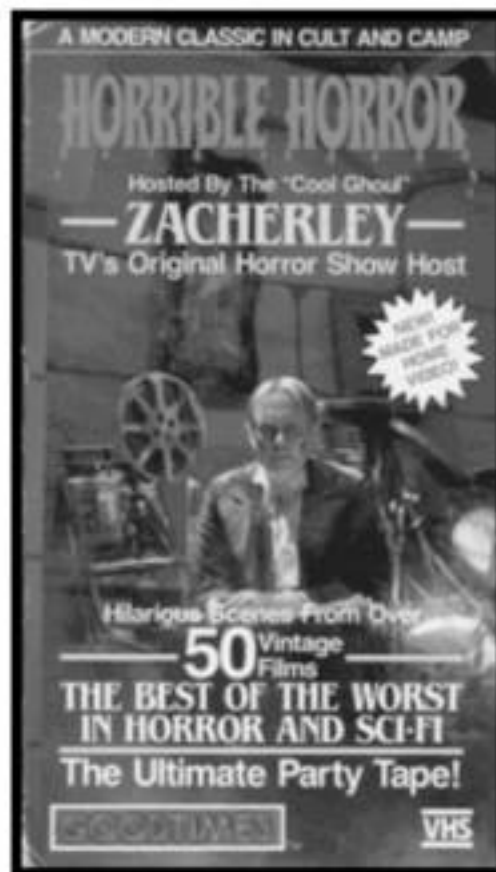
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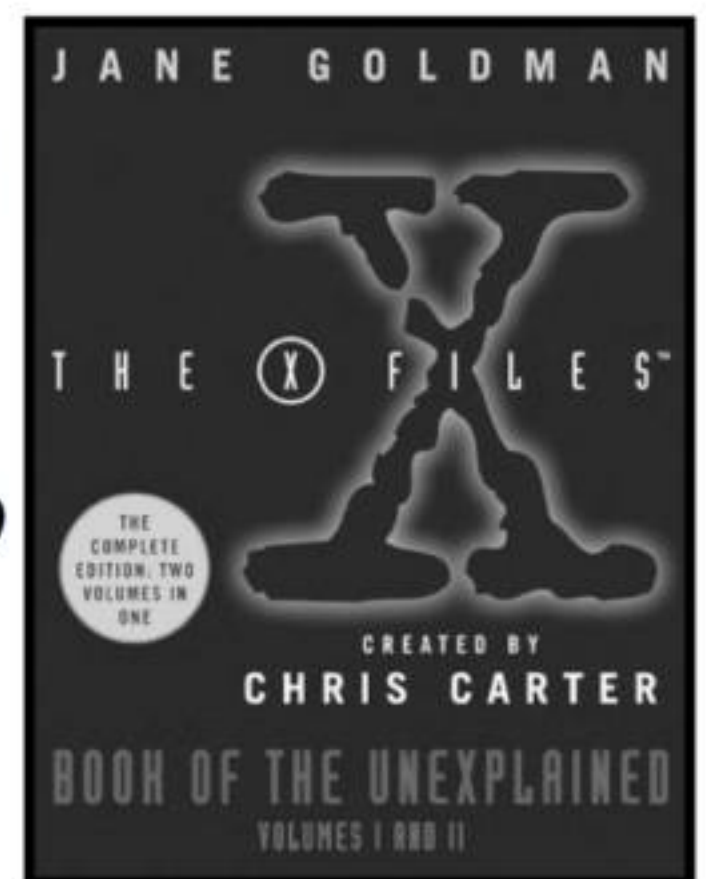
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THE WAYWARD WARRIOR: ANALYZING THE SAVAGE WOLVERINE

By Flynn Cook



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The 1970s was a grungy, cynical, desperate time for the United States. An unpopular war in Vietnam raged on still when the decade began, leaving the U.S. divided amongst itself politically, socially, and perhaps economically. The cultural revolution of the 1960s left in its

wake a nation uncertain of its future, perhaps resulting in a bleakness predicted for the world. Free from the shackles of convention, the country seemed adrift in new surroundings without a life raft.

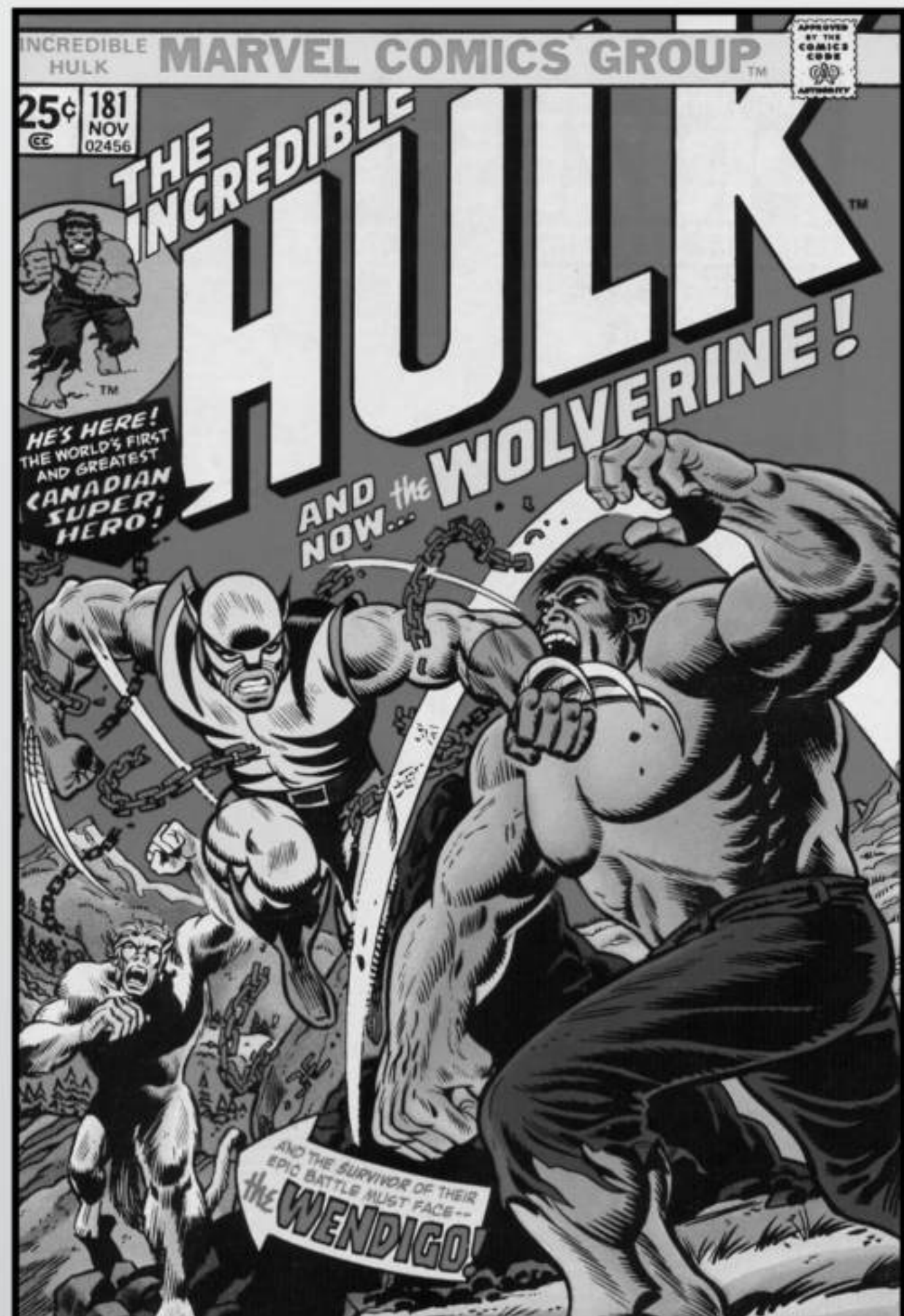
Civil unrest continued out of the war, coming to a head in the Kent State University shootings, where National Guardsmen opened fire on Vietnam War protestors with little provocation, exemplifying the societal distancing between the country's citizens and its government. Not much farther into the decade, then-president Richard Nixon became embroiled in a massive scandal, making him the first (and to-date only) U.S. President to resign office, in order to save himself from prosecution. Further disenfranchising the nation, the U.S. was forced to pull out of Vietnam, with many Americans feeling this was the first time the nation "lost" a war.

Pop culture, as it always does, reflected these events either directly or emotionally. *The French Connection*, released in 1971, was not the first film to feature an anti-hero (a hero who behaves very darkly), but it was the atypical film archetype of what would pervade the entertainment of the day. Gene Hackman's performance as 'Popeye' Doyle gave the movie world a dark, reckless cop who didn't care about rules as long as he brought the guilty to justice – any kind of justice. As previously stated, Doyle was not the first movie anti-hero, but he was the perfect mold for those of the 1970s to come.

1973 saw the release of the Clint Eastwood actioner *Dirty Harry*, in which the actor portrayed the titular cop who broke all the rules, either legal or ethical,

to serve justice and see that victims had their rights honored more than a suspect's. Characters such as Jim Doyle and Harry Callahan echoed the prevailing sentiments of society at the time – that the government was no longer trustable, and no working class people were viewed as worthwhile to said ruling body. Social decay became socially relevant for the first time in that decade, so the culture generated identifiable figureheads. It would not be until the later half of the decade, through films such as *Star Wars* and *Superman: The Movie* that culture would begin to be steered from its bleak outlook.

Anti-heroes hit comics as well, in a big way. Batman had begun to become a grim figure of the night





again in 1969, desperate to get away from his cancelled camp television series. But elsewhere, Captain America became disenfranchised from his own government and retired the identity (albeit briefly). Green Lantern and the Green Arrow joined together on the comics page to tackle the very urban decay that began to date the medium. But one character in particular seemed to

Below: Wolverine accepts Professor X's offer to join the X-Men.

epitomize, on the comics page,



the kind of attitude the country felt – not to mention his methods, origin and very M.O.

Comics did not yet have their own version of Popeye Doyle or Dirty Harry, until Wolverine burst onto the scene in 1974's *The Incredible Hulk* #181. Envisioned as a one-time foe for the Jade Giant, Wolverine instead rose to prominence in the following year's *Giant-Size X-Men* #1, a revival of the almost-mothballed Marvel comic "X-Men" from the early 1960s. Part of a new team, the character stood out from the other members for being not only a scrapper, but also a loudmouthed braggart.

Your average man's man (or perhaps a 1970s man's man), Wolverine went by another name, the enigmatic "Logan," and was a drinking, cigar-chomping surly short man with a perfectly Napoleonic rage. Prone to berserker rages and calling fellow teammate Storm a "broad" (which only enraged another, Colossus), Wolverine was the odder-man-out, on a team of oddballs already.

Created by Len Wein during his run on *The Incredible Hulk*, his already scrappy demeanor was defined at the start. "Giant Size" kept the same attitude, but it was once Chris Claremont took over on the revived *X-Men* (for 17 years, no less) that Wolverine began to get a deeper focus to move beyond what series



artist Dave Cockrum felt to be a one-dimensional, angry man. Within a handful of issues, Wolvie was put in his place by a soon-to-be-Phoenixed Jean Grey, and shown a tender side over her 'loss.' A little bit later, Logan was attacked by Alpha Flight in their first appearance, the story endearing the Canucklehead in a way he hadn't been before, showing that there was a heart of gold under his gruff exterior.

Wolverine captures the spirit of the 1970s perfectly. He's a gritty, do-as-he-feels loner, who doesn't trust any form of government, and always acts as if the world can go sit-and-spin. Although his reasons for distrust of government weren't revealed until later in a 1991 story called "Weapon X" (appearing in *Marvel Comics Presents*), it seemed tailor-made for the character since his inception. A war mongering government that brainwashes a man into the

ultimate weapon, along with surgical experimentation, paints a very 1970s portrait of a Nixon-type abuse of power and that obsession with ultimate soldiers, at the cost of humanity (shades of Vietnam) doesn't hurt the connection either.

The ways in which Chris Claremont began to humanize the one-time one-dimensional character was subtle at first. His crush on Jean Grey but his resistance to pursuing it because she was taken was an admirable slant to him, showing an honorable side that few might have seen coming from such a rough-and-tumble fellow. The idea that he had any control over himself was in stark contrast to what viewers may learn from a cursory glance. In *X-Men* #109, an exchange between him and Storm showed a gentle side:

WOLVERINE

"I been outta the woods too long. I'm itchin' t' do some huntin'."

STORM

"You would take the lives of innocent animals—not for survival, but merely for sport?!"

WOLVERINE

"I said huntin' honeybunch—I said nothin' about killin'. It takes **no** skill t' kill. What takes skill is sneakin' up close enough to a skittish doe t' touch her."

STORM

"Wolverine, I am sorry. I...misjudged you."

WOLVERINE

"I could care les, 'Roro. You've **all** been misjudgin' me since the day I joined this turkey outfit!"

Consistently, Wolverine was shown to be a dutiful soldier to the X-Men's cause. Occasionally clashing, but never outright rejecting the authority of either Professor Xavier or even Cyclops, which stands in stark contrast to many later versions of the character. His temper was very harsh, but he was always trustworthy and could always be counted on to do the right thing, and to see a mission through.

Even going into the 1980s, Wolverine's harshness remained to an extent. Arguably from a story standpoint, the character had been mellowed a tad with being an X-Man. But his slight cynicism was perhaps a little more biting than before in the optimistic America headed by Ronald Reagan. Logan seemed to represent the perfect balance of fury, cynical awareness, and loyalty. Frequently put into situations where he must give his life to save another, Wolverine always made the sacrificial choice without a second thought. Even to Rogue, who was new to the team and a fierce former villain when they first fought together on the X-Men, he deliberately gave her his healing factor to save her life, having found his trust for her by the story's end.

His recklessness at times is logical, given his advanced healing factor. But in stories more recently, his healing has been ratcheted up to much higher levels. In the earlier days, if he wasn't careful, he would certainly die before his healing could make a dent. No matter the



era, this advantage allows Wolvie to go further above and beyond than many of his other teammates can. And despite his relatively short reach tactically (given that his claws are not projectile), he has shown himself repeatedly to be one of the most valuable members of the team through his bravery, cunning and tactical skill alone.

Wolverine was fast becoming the outsider only in spirit, not in attitude. Unique because of his tortured (and repressed or erased) past, he never felt like he truly belonged among other men. That, perhaps, he should run with the animals as one of their kind. The beautiful confusion of this is that we, as the reader, can see that the opposite was true (at least until later iterations). Wolvie was always afraid that he was one step away from being a mindless animal, but it was clear that he was far more man than he realized, and had nothing to fear.

The 1982 self-titled miniseries found Claremont and other comics luminary Frank Miller exploring Wolverine's most tender side, and also his own sense of ethics and where he stood in the social status of the world. Readers were already introduced to his *true* love, Mariko Yashida, in *X-Men* #118, so the miniseries saw Logan venture back to Japan when he hears of her trouble. There he finds her bequeathed to another man by her father, as per Japanese culture. Seeing Mariko badly beaten by her bequeathed husband, Wolverine tries to defend her honor, and finds himself beaten down worse than ever before. Not just physically, but emotionally as

well. By the story's end, Wolverine has spared Mariko from an unhappy fate, and put down some nasty villains to-boot. He also came out of the ordeal a wiser, more self-assured man than before, with his visions of being too rough for society quenched just enough. It is this story that drives the plot for this summer's latest X-Blockbuster *The Wolverine* – but more on that later.

By the late 1980s, Wolverine had become a steadfast member of the X-Men, offering up tactical strategy, guidance to newer recruits, and even fighting to save Kitty Pryde's soul in another Japan-centric storyline called, unsurprisingly, *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine*. Storm had long since been the new leader of the X-Men, and Professor X had also been out among the cosmos with his love: Lilandra of the Shi'ar Empire. During a storyline in which Storm had personal business to attend to, she put Wolverine in charge of the team, much to his distaste. Not for any reason other than he felt himself too unreliable and too unpredictable to be a leader. Something that we as readers knew the same as Storm: it



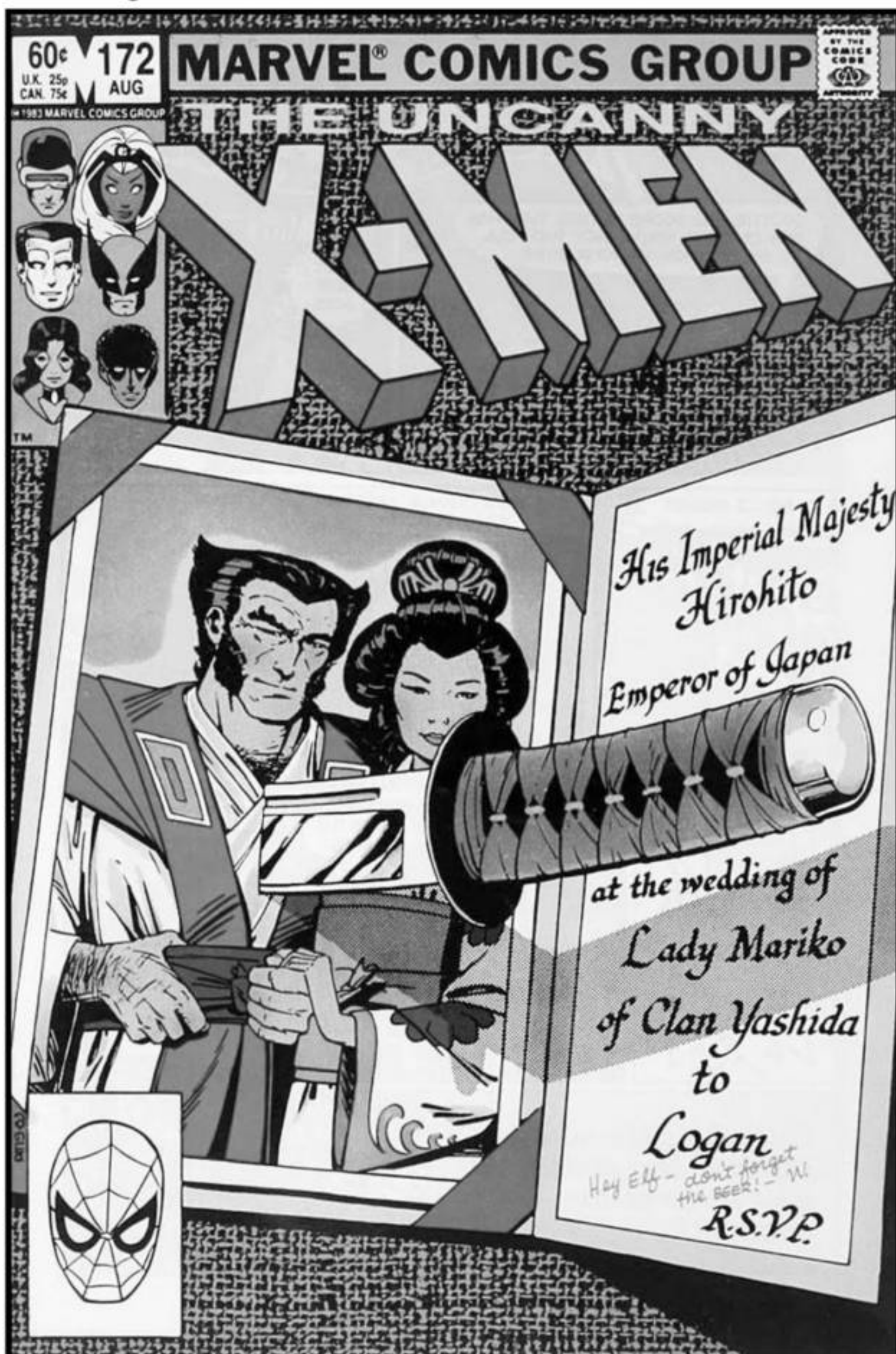
wasn't true. For the record, he was actually a rather good leader.

Moving into the 1990s, "The best there is" faced new challenges due to his skyrocketing popularity. Writers after Claremont incidentally put the character's progression back a tad, returning much of his unstable and cruel roots to the forefront. Appropriate, since the 1990s culture

seemed to backlash against the optimism of the '80s with grunge rock and urban culture again at the nexus of many facets of popular media. Extreme nihilism was the new order of the day. Wolverine became more unleashed than days past, with artists such as Jim Lee giving the character a more fierce depiction than we'd yet seen. When the hot heroes are the devil-powered Spawn and The Punisher, along with a replacement, psychotic Batman, Wolverine had to keep up or be found "not hardcore" enough.

The next decade began with a bang – a live action X-Men film finally arrived. Stage actor Hugh Jackman had been picked to play the ol' Canuklehead and although he was physically wrong for the part (almost a foot taller than the micro hero), his first performance managed to capture some of the character's fury, but more of the hidden kindness he carried, along with his tragic emotional state. Watching out for a wayward Rogue (similar to his friendships with both Kitty Pryde and Jubilee in the comics) brought out the nurturing side of the character and allowed Jackman to make the role three-dimensional, similar to the way Chris Claremont shaped Logan in his formative years.

Sadly almost all of that was stripped away in the sequel, which found the character reduced to a berserker that was intolerant of just about everything. The third film, however, *X-Men: The Last Stand* found Wolverine touching on some of his more honorable characteristics. His love for Jean Grey was finally explored a little deeper, and Logan's natural qualities for leadership blossomed alongside Storm, who finally was given the comics-accurate position of team leader after





Hugh Jackman's debut as Wolverine in *X-Men*.



Cyclops was taken out in the film's first act.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine was a wrongfully maligned film that depicted how the movie universe's Weapon X program played out. Here, Jackman finally perfected his characterization of the comic book hero, giving the role a confidence, nobility and inner-peace that previous performances lacked in translating from the original comics. The books depicted a man who would be perfectly happy to forgo violence and live in happiness in the wilderness. Wolverine is a simple man, content with a good life and good love. An honest existence is where his soul lies, and perhaps that is why Wolverine is so inexorably drawn to Japan, since the traditional culture there so mirrored his own outlook. To him, killing is a sometimes-necessary evil. He doesn't take pleasure in it.

Hugh Jackman has earned his claws in spades. So where does he go now? As previously mentioned: to Japan. Hitting theaters by the time you read this, *The Wolverine* looks to be a generally faithful adaptation of the 1982 miniseries by Claremont and Miller, along with elements from the recent Wolverine anime and the two issues of *X-Men* that followed the miniseries originally (#172-173). While establishing his romance with Mariko Yashida, the film will also find a way to reduce the movie Wolvie's extremely accelerated healing factor, and also pit him against two of his other villains that aren't Sabretooth. Viper, in the comics a former wife of his, and the Silver Samurai; Mariko's lethal mutant cousin. Also present will be Mariko's father Shingen Yashida, who is a ruthless overlord whose climactic duel with Wolverine is one of the character's all-time best fights. It also appears to have made it into the film.

Wolverine as a character has come a long way from being a composite for 1970s anti-heroism. Frequently, he is listed in the higher positions in "best character" lists, and for good reason. He speaks to outsiders, to the angry and misunderstood, to the uncertain and to the internally peaceful, the soulful and the violent. It is rare that a character can be endearing to so many in so many ways. He is one of the most layered and complex heroes of all comicdom, and he's

earned his success.

He's the best there is at what he does; and what he does best is tell a compelling story, bub.

ADDENDUM: Must-Read Wolverine

1. *Wolverine* by Chris Claremont and Frank Miller.

If there's only one Wolverine book you buy, make this one it.

2. *ESSENTIAL Uncanny X-Men* by Chris Claremont and others.

Any of the now-11 volumes of these affordable, thick black-and-white reprints are a must-read for Wolverine fans, since most of his meatiest character development happened in the pages of *X-Men*.

3. *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* by Chris Claremont and Al Milgrom.

The prototype of the movie's relationship with Rogue, this book is an endearing and powerful showcase for Wolverine's inherent heroism and his compassion for others.



4. *Wolverine: Weapon X* by Barry Windsor-Smith.

This is the original story that showed comic fans everywhere exactly what was done to him and what he didn't remember (until recently).

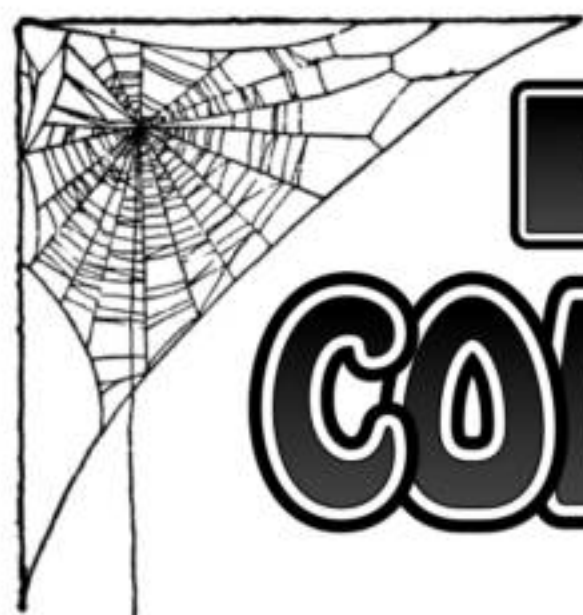
5. *Marvel Comics Presents: Wolverine* (Vol. 1)

by Chris Claremont and John Buscema. Wolverine's earliest solo stories (after the '82 series) happened in the anthology book "Marvel Comics

Presents," and saw Wolverine's person get further expanded upon without a team dynamic to dilute his violence.

6. *Wolverine: Old Man Logan* by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven.

Fans who think Wolverine would never hang up his claws must read this futuristic, post-apocalyptic tale of a Logan beaten down farther than ever before, but is spurred back into action when he's pushed farther than any challenge he has yet faced.



DAVEY HORROR'S COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THE BLACK CAT

Often regarded as one of the best films to star both Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, 1934's *The Black Cat* was also the first (of eight) to feature the iconic duo together on the silver screen. Directed by Edgar G. Ulmer, *The Black Cat* was Universal Pictures' biggest box office hit of 1934.

The film has a number of memorable scenes, but none more horrific than the climatic 'skinning scene'. Davey Horror pays homage to this scene, as well as the immortal Karloff, with his superbly customized model kit diorama. Originally, the resin model kit consisted only of Karloff as the sadistic architect, Hjalmar Poelzig, holding his feline companion.

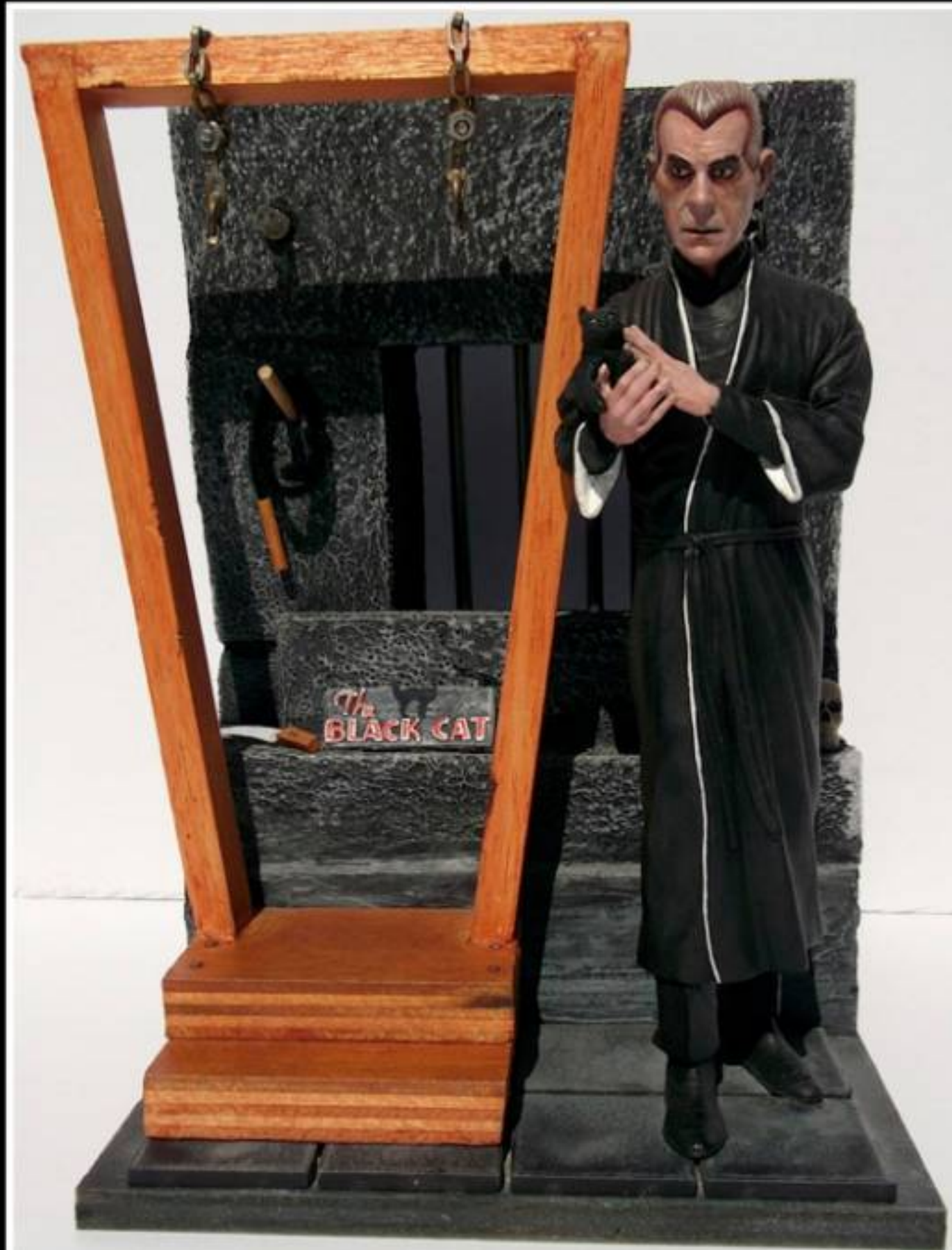
With some imagination and no shortage of creativity, Davey situated the model to accommodate a much larger diorama (see inside back cover). The custom base was fashioned out of wood with added floor tiling, while the dungeon-like background was constructed out of styrofoam. Wooden dowels were used to make the cell bars. The whip hanging on the wall was made out of pipe cleaner. The knife near the film's nameplate was crafted out of wood for the handle and shiny, reflective plastic for the blade. The skull at the other side of the diorama was borrowed from another model kit.

Lastly, Karloff's unforgettable torture rack from the film was constructed out of balsa wood with rubber washers being used for the hanging wrist manacles.



"THE BLACK CAT" Copyright 1934 Universal Pictures. All Rights Reserved.





Davey Horror's stunning model kit customization of Boris Karloff in the 1934 Universal film, *The Black Cat*.



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SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE

#8

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